

The Princess's Spirit Trilogy:

An Early 21st Century Liberty Movement Story

2020 Updated Edition

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The Music in this Book

The music included in Chapters 3, 6, 9, 11 and 19 of this book is available on the original TaraElla albums **LOVE IS ALL AROUND US** and **YOUR LOVE MAKES THE WORLD BEAUTIFUL**.

Visit **www.taraella.com** to get these tracks and other music from TaraElla.

For more Princess's Spirit Ideas

There are more fiction and non-fiction titles by TaraElla relating to the Princess's Spirit concept.

TaraElla also maintains a blog and (upcoming) show inspired by the Princess's Spirit, called The TaraElla Show.

Visit **www.taraella.com** to find out more.

Disclaimer

All events described within or in relation to Pacificland are fictional. Any resemblance to real events are coincidental.

While effort has been made to describe accurately the international historical events referenced in the book, the accuracy of such events described cannot be guaranteed.

Preface (2020 Edition)

This book is about the spirit of the early 21st century. It contains entirely fictional characters in an entirely fictional setting, and there are many elements of fantasy in the story, but it aimed to capture something real: the social and political coming of age of the Millennial generation (born around 1980-1996), and the major world events that marked the start of political consciousness for this generation.

This book is also about something else: the divergent path the lays ahead of us, and the recent history that has brought us here. The path of liberty for all vs the path of an artificially engineered society. At the beginning of the story (i.e. in the first book of the trilogy, as it was originally published), i.e. in the early 2000s, an authoritarian conservatism was dominant in the politics of the Western world. The two most characteristic events of this authoritarian conservatism were the launch of the Iraq War by the US and her allies, despite widespread domestic opposition in many countries ('not in my name, not with my taxes'); and the push to stop any further progress on the issue of marriage equality for gay couples. Furthermore, conservative politicians during this era often criticized multiple aspects of youth culture, from video games, to hip-hop music, to fashion. It is in this context that the majority of young people turned against the political establishment, and sought a more liberal politics ('more

liberal' is used here as a big-tent, meaning everything from progressivism to libertarianism, to a more 'modern' and libertarian conservatism).

However, a fork in the road ahead appeared around the early 2010s. In fact, I think that this development may have been bubbling under the surface for even longer, as was illustrated in this book. The Millennials soon became divided between those who favour more liberty, and those who favour artificial social engineering in the name of 'social justice'. Even more ironically, just when some conservatives began to embrace liberty and end their opposition to things like gay marriage, the so-called 'left' began to pick up authoritarian elements, roughly cancelling out the progress of liberty on the right. In the book, Change The Era (CTE) represents the authoritarian-left camp. I didn't talk much about the ideology of CTE, because I thought that it might distract from the story, and also because at the time of writing (2015-16) it still wasn't entirely clear what direction the 'new authoritarians' were heading into. However, some of my more recent (and soon to be published) work, which deals with ideologies like critical theory, conflict theory and postmodernism, as well as the 'legacy' of the radical 1960s, should shed some light.

The book has the kind of ending that I personally wish to see: mass awakening that liberty is the way to go; that

authoritarian movements promising 'progressive change' actually lead to nowhere. Of course, in the real world, the issue didn't actually get resolved in 2016, far from it. In fact, the polarization between libertarians (in a big-tent sense) and authoritarians only got worse since the election of US President Donald Trump in late 2016. The new authoritarian-left appears to have made huge gains since Trump's election, by recruiting disappointed and angry young people everywhere. In the book, I hinted that this might happen, by hinting that CTE would actually prefer to have the conservatives in power, which would suit their longer term goals. Little did I know that, in real life, something similar to that was about to happen.

Overall, the narrative in this book represents one kind of political coming of age of the Millennial generation in the early 21st century. Angelle and her friends set out to fight an authoritarian establishment, and bring about a new world of liberty. But along the way, a substantial part of her generation were tempted by authoritarianism and its promises of utopia, which greatly complicated the long march towards freedom. I sincerely hope that, like Angelle and her friends, real life Millennial freedom fighters will find a happy ending after all.

Chapter 1

Angelle's New Era

Angelle had just finished her breakfast. As she turned away from the table and started walking back to her room, she took a glance at the calendar. The thought that it was already the 16th of February 2003 suddenly hit her. It's been more than six weeks since her self promised new era had arrived. She needed to do more to prepare for this important year, the foundational year of the great new era.

2003 was going to be a big year for Angelle. It was the beginning of her 'development' as an aspiring Cultural Royal, one of the group of people elected to help shape Pacificland's future, and to many, one of the highest honours that a Pacificland citizen can have. This year, like most other aspiring cultural princes and princesses of Pacificland turning 14, she would

start at the Royal College of Pacificland, which she gained admission to last year, to the celebration of family and friends. Of course, going to Royal College was itself a great thing, and most graduates are set for life in terms of jobs and careers. But that was not Angelle's real goal, not that she had told anyone else about her grander plan. Many great lords and kings, (and maybe one day even a queen?), had their start at the Royal College, and then got elected as a Cultural Royal, something that Royal College students have a great advantage in, as per tradition.

Being someone historical. Contributing to the history of Pacificland, and hence potentially all humankind too. It's the dream of every idealist. It was certainly the dream of Angelle's mother, Anne, when she was young. She was not even a student at Royal College, and yet she became one of the few who were popularly elected to the Heirs Council, a council for up-and-coming

Cultural Royals, running on a friend's friend's ticket. Regrettably, she only ever made it that far. It wasn't easy to get further without the proper connections, the proper titles, the proper prestige. Her father was always much more practical. He was brought up with the knowledge that his heritage wasn't of sufficient prestige to carry him anywhere far, and so focussed his efforts on the economic improvement of his house. Regrettably, too, all that went up in smoke during the major stock market crash of 1997.

Angelle is determined to follow her mother's dreams, and this time she is determined to find success. 'The second generation makes it,' she has often told herself. Surely she still has plenty of disadvantages to overcome. A less than prestigious background and limited resources due to the family's partial financial ruin for one. But it's the 21st century, a time when technology levels the playing field in everything,

right? In her parents' time people had to cultivate vast information networks to be able to have a grasp on developments from every corner of the world. But thanks to a development called the internet, even well-informed commoners can now know more about the current world than some old lords. In a few years' time, when everyone moves to broadband internet, and the promise of 'Web 2.0' comes true, things will get even better. (Angelle didn't exactly know what 'Web 2.0' meant, but she was sure it was going to be important.)

Technology isn't only good for gathering information either. It could also become a great tool used to overcome hard limits imposed by conventional systems. Just a few days ago she read in the papers that a band of musicians banished by their patron two years ago nevertheless were still making quite a fortune using technology. They recorded their music in

a garage with the assistance of computers, and distributed their music to their already well developed fan base via the internet. Just a few more years ago, any band of musicians banished by their patrons would find themselves limited to playing for extremely small audiences, almost begging for a living. Many such bands would have to become boring ceremony bands, playing the same tired old stuff at every wedding they go to. With the right patrons musicians get to be known and popular around the world, playing to filled concert halls of thousands of people everywhere they go. Without a patron, life gets very difficult. But even here, things are changing.

Besides technology and the levelling playing field, there is something else in Angelle's favour too, she believes. Recent history has shown that she has a talent for bringing people together to work as a team. This mostly refers to the teams of 'leftovers' she has often been able to

assemble, and become leader of, for things such as school projects or local karaoke competitions. From the outside, Angelle often just looked like one of the smarter social outcasts or 'leftovers' who therefore had to do this work. But Angelle knew that if she actively begged she would have been allowed to join a team before being 'left over'. It's just that following another leader was not how she was designed to work. This year, she was going to start her new era by assembling her team, doing what she does best. But this time it was not going to be a 'leftover' team. She was going to actively reach out to build this dream team. A team that will help her overcome all sorts of disadvantages, and most importantly of all, the connection and prestige disadvantage.

She would need to get to work soon. The new era kicks off. Angelle isn't entirely sure whether she is really ready, but she has waited her entire

life for this. "Bring it on," she thought. "I'm ready."

Chapter 2

The Royal College

From the outside, the Royal College looked just like any ordinary, gray building, like all the other ones found in this part of town. But as Angelle stepped into its doors into the foyer, the place suddenly seemed much older, much more classical. For unlike the building itself, which had only about 50 years of history, the interiors were hundreds of years old. The bricks, the columns, and even the furniture, they were all disassembled from the previous Royal College building in Western Europe and shipped here to be reassembled. Beyond the foyer was the inner courtyard. It too looked classically European, for it was a replica of the front garden of the old Royal College.

Angelle felt awkward walking in a long robe, especially since it was in red, blue and gold, her

family's house colours. Not to mention the warm weather today made things even worse. Her right arm is also getting tired from carrying the family flag, a large flag of red, blue and gold again, hoisted on a golden flagstaff. It won't be like this every day though, because students are only required to wear their royal robes and carry their family flags on Welcome Day and other special occasions. In front of her, Angelle could see a sea of colours, stretching as far as the eyes can see. The colours of every robe, representing the family colours of each house, was at least slight different, just like no two family flags were the same. Well, except for those who are siblings or cousins, of course.

Following the stream of people in front of her, Angelle stepped into the grand doors of the lobby. The lobby was a moderately small chamber, with two staircases on the left and right leading upstairs, and another set of big, grand doors at the end, leading to the inner

courtyard, which appeared to be deserted at the moment. Instead, everyone appeared to be streaming up the staircases. In front of the staircases, there was a sign pointing houses A-M to the left staircase, and houses N-Z to the right one, so Angelle knew clearly where she had to go.

Once on the upper floor, Angelle could see a long corridor with the sign 'Discussion Rooms', with many rooms on both sides. But this was not where the people were going today. Instead, they passed into a place called the 'Allies Living Quarters', which featured a comfortable lounge with sofas and a small kitchen, and two lifts leading to 'Floors 3-25'. But this wasn't their destination either. Angelle could now see that they were actually heading for the Great Hall, its grand entrance could now be seen at the end of the lounge of the living quarters.

Once inside, Angelle could see that the Great Hall really does live up to its name. In fact, it looked like an even larger version of the Pacificland National Opera House, itself a replica of the Opera House in Paris. There was a sea of red chairs, with signs carrying the letters of the alphabet standing in front of every few rows. Angelle knew she had to find the letter J. Once there, she noticed that each chair had a person's name and a house name on it. After searching for some time, she found the one labelled 'Angelle, Easterner', and sat down. At the back of each seat she noticed a familiar slot. Thanks to her having watched Heirs Council meetings on television before, she knew this was the place to put the house family flag.

After what felt like forever, a tall, old man walked onto the stage. He was dressed in a robe that had five colours, red, yellow, green, blue

and purple. Angelle immediately recognised these as the school colours of Royal College.

"Welcome students," he said.

"Welcome to the Royal College, for the new students. For the old ones, it's welcome back for another year. For those who still don't know me, I am Holland Northhome, Principle of this College. I know it may be boring for the old students, but for the benefit of the new students, I'm going to have to give the annual introductory talk again.

"Royal College is a very old tradition indeed. For the last 422 years, it has provided a great education to future royals around the world, from the oldest campus back in Northern Europe, where the college was founded, to our second campus in Western Europe, and finally,

in the last half a century, in this rather new campus.

"Young royals are the future of our society. As such, we have a duty to provide you with the best education, so that you can learn from our history, and have the capacity to think critically in facing the future, a future of uncertainties, a future where new challenges arise with every generation. For hundreds of years, our students have gone on to become important thinkers, leaders, and even in some cases, revolutionaries, the best example of which was during the movement to introduce a popular vote of the King, or a similar position, often called the President or Prime Minister, in many kingdoms.

"Back in Europe, the College used to provide education only for the allied kingdoms of Europe and North America. Today, the great

tradition of alliances amongst these houses is still represented here, most notably in the Allies Living Quarters. However, after the humanity crisis of the Second World War, we could no longer continue this boundary of exclusion. Therefore, since the College moved here to Pacificland, we have also welcomed the guest houses, those from places as varied as the Asia and the vast continent of Africa. These houses are represented in the Guest Living Quarters, on the other side of this building.

"Now, it's time for another great tradition of the College. I will call upon each student, in alphabetical order according to the name of their House, to come up on stage and be officially enrolled as a student at the Royal College. Each student will also be given their timetables. Every enrolment will be photographed by our professional photographer, and the photos will be given to

you next week. Now let us begin. Miss Abigail of House Acadia!

Angelle felt a bit nervous, but was also a bit excited. After all, this was considered a rite of passage for all aspiring royals.

After what felt like an eternity, she finally heard her name being called. "Miss Angelle of Easterner!"

Angelle walked on stage, lifting her head up high, trying her best to smile and look confident. "If you can't even handle this, how can you achieve your dreams in life," she told herself.

Once on stage, the process was quite simple, surprisingly. All she had to do was to sign her

name on a piece of paper, and receive her timetables from Principle Holland. It was all over within three minutes.

Chapter 3

The Princess Spirit Society

It is already 3am in the morning, but Angelle still cannot sleep. Tomorrow is Societies Day at the Royal College, and it is an opportunity to start building her future that she just cannot give up or mess up. On Societies Day, the two hundred or so clubs, or Societies, as they are officially known as, are invited to set up stalls in the Inner Courtyard and Outer Courtyard of the college to recruit new members, and will be provided material to do so free of charge. New Societies can also be registered on that day, and start collecting members immediately. In fact, half of the Inner Courtyard is reserved for new Societies each year. It really is a great opportunity to make friends, and look like a leader. Trouble is, Angelle still doesn't know what Society to start. The list of Societies she received yesterday looks like it has every

conceivable Society there already. What more could she add?

Angelle decided to get up and write a song. She found that sometimes that can help.

"Listen to My Heart

What they tell you is just so confusing

Sometimes you don't know what to do

And in this world there are so many crossroads

Which path should I go down

Sometimes I wonder why some cling onto

Walls that only make

Their own lives harder than how it should be

Let them go and we'll have freedom

I'll just listen to my heart

Live by doing what feels right

What really makes my life better

Should be the way to go

There are many stupid rules

But they don't do any good

Why should we be bothered with them

When we should know better

Time resolves all things

But at what cost

For me, will it be too late

Have you asked

I'll just listen to my heart

Live by doing what feels right

What really makes my life better

Should be the way to go"

As she reached below her pillow, Angelle noticed that a book was there. She remembered that it was 'The Princess Spirit', the book she was reading just before she went to bed, the book she would read before any important 'battle' in her life. When she was young, her mom gave her this book. Inside there were 20 lessons for young princesses, which she took to heart. When she becomes a Cultural Princess, she will lead by example, fulfilling the ideals in the book, she had promised herself since then. "Yes, this would be

her great idea. Tomorrow, she would go to Royal College to start the Princess Spirit Society," she thought. She could now sleep, knowing what to do finally.

As she walked into Royal College today, Angelle could see that people were already setting up stalls in the Outer Courtyard. As she stepped inside the College building, she could see a long line that had formed in front of the registration and supplies stall. She joined the line, and fifteen minutes later, she was allocated a stall in the Inner Courtyard, and a set of materials including a few cardboard pieces, crayons in ten different colours, and some blu-tack.

After she got to her stall, the first thing Angelle did was to use different coloured crayons to

write The Princess Spirit Society on the banner located at the top of the stall. A multicoloured title would surely gain more attention, she thought, not to mention that it looked pretty nice. Next, she wrote down the 20 lessons from the book onto the largest piece of cardboard, using every crayon exactly twice, cycling the colours. She then stuck this piece of cardboard on the stall, so everyone walking by could see it. Now that the stall was set up, she just had to wait.

After two hours, she had her first visitor.

"Hi, I'm Jenelle," the tall blonde said as she walked towards the stall. Angelle was excited to finally have a visitor.

"Hi, I'm Angelle, and we are setting up a new society today, the Princess Spirit Society," Angelle said.

"I'm going to have to stop you right there. Who's we? Where are the other people," Jenelle said.

"Well... they are busy... so I'm left to look after this stall, because I'm the president," Angelle said.

"Busy or non-existent? I actually guess non-existent, because I don't think anybody else wants to be a part of the rainbow crayon princess society," Jenelle said.

"It's not about rainbow crayons, you know, it's about a great idea. The Princess Spirit," Angelle said.

"Oh, The Princess Spirit. It sounds like I'm too old for that. And most people here would be too," Jenelle said, and started walking away.

"Don't you want to find out more?" Angelle screamed out.

Angelle almost cried. But she knew she had to carry on. It would look bad otherwise. "Those destined for greatness never give up on their dreams. Those who give up were simply never destined for greatness in the first place. Never give up despite the odds," she said to herself. So she pretended to smile, and after a while, was back to normal.

At the end of the day, the names of three other first years, 'Princess Natalie of House Eastpark', 'Princess Jenny of House Gold', and 'Prince Daniel of House Benring', were on the signup sheet. (They literally wrote their names this way.) This was still a start, Angelle thought. Not that Angelle knew a lot about these people yet. They came in a group, all three of them, and they just read the cardboard and put their names on the sheet, and walked away. The next

step was to connect with these people, and see if we can all be friends.

Chapter 4

War Breaks Out

Every day when classes ended for the midday break, the Princess Spirit club, i.e. Angelle, Natalie, Jenny and Daniel would walk together along the corridors and down the staircase, and through the doors outside to the inner courtyard, where they would sit in the warm sunshine and have their lunch. Today, however, the courtyard looked different. There were many people in there, mostly older students from the upper years, and they were holding up banners and chanting loudly. Angelle and her friends walked towards one of those people, and asked him what was going on.

"We are opposed to the War in Western Asia," he said. "You don't like wars, do you? You should sign our petition!"

"What war are you talking about?" Angelle asked.

"The government here in Pacificland will join an international war against a country in the western part of Asia. The war is aggression. We simply wish to tell the King we, the people, don't want the war. Signatures of young future royals like you will help us greatly," he said.

"But why does the King want us to go to war, if the people don't want it?" Angelle asked.

"The reasons are complex, it's all about who looks powerful, but it's just bad for humanity," he explained.

So the King is joining an international war to look powerful? The King of Pacificland needs to do this? Angelle was surprised. Angelle didn't like the idea of war anyway. Princesses shouldn't support wars, she believed. She thought of the Princess Spirit Book again. One rule was to help the less fortunate, and another

was to never wilfully harm others. War seems like something she can't support.

"And what's the reason for the war again, according to those who want it?" Angelle asked.

"I think they say it's about spreading liberty," Jenny said.

"Of course that's what they say. They always say that. But it's about making themselves look good. You know, to some people, a King who leads what looks like a just war, even if it's actually unjust, looks like a hero. It's good for their re-election," the young man explained.

"But bombing people to give them freedom? That doesn't make sense?" Natalie asked.

"Of course it doesn't make sense to you and me. But many people don't think that way. They see a King spreading justice around the world," the young man said.

"But why this country many miles away?" Angelle asked.

"But that's the point. People who are so 'foreign' that they are 'them' and not 'us'. Isn't it?" Natalie said.

"Your friend is very right. So are you going to sign our petition?" the young man asked Angelle again.

Angelle looked at the others, not really knowing what to do.

"My parents never sign anything like this, so I think we shouldn't," Jenny said.

"It's sometimes OK to sign petitions, but you don't want to be associated with certain organisations. It will ruin your future," Natalie offered.

Angelle really felt bad about just walking away now, but she shared similar concerns as her friends.

"Do you represent an organisation?" she asked the man.

"We are the Social Justice Group," he replied.

"And everyone else is part of that too?" she asked.

"Not really. There are many organisations out here today," he replied.

"Does anyone not represent any organisation here?" she asked.

"I think there are some. Most people here represent organisations. But it's OK, if you sign, it doesn't mean you join the organisation," he replied.

Angelle thought for a while.

"I'm sorry, but I think I'll sign a petition not associated with an organisation. They all go to the King anyway, right?" she said.

"I guess you can say that. Nice to meet you then," he said, and they parted.

Angelle and friends searched through the crowd and talked to lots of people, from lots of different organisations.

Finally they found someone who fit their criteria.

"We are not an organisation. We are Freedom Fighters. We fight for freedom," the young man explained. He gave them each a booklet. "Read this. It explains what freedom is, and why you should support freedom too."

"You really don't represent an organisation?" Natalie asked, still a bit sceptical.

"No, we don't. Indeed, our petition has the college letterhead on it, and it has no organisation name anywhere. It would break school rules to add the name of another organisation on documents with the college letterhead," he explained, and let them look at the petition book.

Angelle was satisfied. She decided to sign, and the others did too.

"We just did a good thing, I think," Angelle said.

"Me too, actually," Daniel said.

When she got home, Angelle had a lot to think about. Kings and governments were supposed to look after people, right? Do kings actually join wars just to make themselves look good, at great cost to humanity? Or is there some other story? Can wars actually spread liberty? But isn't that idea ridiculous?

Thinking deeper, if the King wants to wage a war, where does his authority to do so come

from? It's because the people trust him. Where does the money come from? The people again, in the form of taxes, of which her parents paid a lot every year. "I wouldn't want to help pay for a war I don't want and the rest of us don't want either. A real princess doesn't do that," Angelle thought. But thinking deeper again, there's no choice, really. Taxes have to be paid. But don't we pay taxes for running the country, not for wars miles away? This made Angelle question the virtue, or lack thereof, of the King and the government again. More importantly, she was also now questioning if we really lived in a free country, here in Pacifiland. So much for 'spreading liberty' if you don't even have enough at home.

Freedom. What is freedom? And why is it so important, why is this keeping her up at night, and why is this the justification of war? Can wars spread freedom again? She decided to

read the Freedom Fighter's booklet. Maybe it will give her some insight.

Chapter 5

The Princess Spirit's First Test

A few days ago, Angelle had spent a whole night reading The Freedom Fighter's Manifesto, the booklet she received a week earlier from a self-proclaimed Freedom Fighter. These few days she couldn't take her mind off what she had read. The booklet talked about many things that had not occurred to her before. The booklet talked about how freedom was good for individuals, families and communities, and was ultimately better than what any good king can provide for his subjects. This is in contradiction to Angelle's upbringing, where she was taught that nations thrive with good kings and fall when they have bad kings. The book also contained interesting quotes from 'freedom thinkers'. "So-called good kings often still do plenty of things detrimental to the welfare of people and families everywhere, like wage wars on innocent people, so they can stay in power,"

was one quote that got Angelle thinking really hard. "Freedom is the ultimate protection against bad kings, because even with elections, bad kings can lie to get into power, and use tricky means to stay there forever," was another one.

One chapter of the book was particularly challenging for Angelle, however. It was the chapter on how kings around the world, including so-called good kings, actively oppressed gay and lesbian people and their families. "The so-called duty of good kings to uphold the so-called laws of nature is often really an excuse to impose a certain designed order on humankind, in a fashion often against what nature really is like," the book stated. The statement looked so logical to Angelle, but its implications regarding same-sex couples did not look so easy. "Same-sex couples should be allowed the freedom to marry as they wish, and it will be not only consistent with freedom but

be good for everyone, couples who will have much to contribute to a society where they are loved and respected," was how it was spelt out in the book. What Angelle had learnt, up until now, was that a duty of a good king was to uphold the laws of nature, and people partnering with others of the same-sex was not what nature intended, so good kings had to discourage it. Her family had taught her this, and her previous friends also thought likewise. To support same-sex marriages would also be to go against majority opinion, considering that a poll done last year found that less than 30% of Pacificland's citizens supported the government granting equality to same-sex couples. At least in Pacificland, in 2003, people like Angelle's family and friends are in the majority, clearly, and a good king should know to respect that, she was taught in the first week here at Royal College.

Angelle decided to raise the issue with Natalie.

"What's wrong with gay and lesbian people?" Natalie replied, looking a bit disgusted.

Angelle thought she had gone too far, and decided to retreat a little. "It's just that the majority don't think gay marriages should be accepted. Good kings need to listen to the majority, right?" she offered.

"You really think that's true? That the majority should always rule?" Natalie said.

"It's what they taught us in week one," Angelle replied, a bit unsure now.

"The majority once thought that slavery was right too, you know. That's why we had slaves until less than 200 years ago. People were born or sold into slavery for life, and they lived a life of misery because the majority agreed with it. The majority can be unjust," Natalie said.

"So you support gay marriage?" Angelle asked.

"Of course. These people have difficult enough lives already, and anyone with half a heart

wouldn't want to deny them even basic rights. I would be very sad if I couldn't marry the person I loved. How should they be any different?" Natalie replied.

Angelle thought for a while, and there was silence.

"Come have lunch with me today," Natalie said. "I'll introduce you to my sister."

Natalie was privately offended that Angelle didn't seem very comfortable with gay and lesbian people and same-sex marriages. For her, the struggle is personal. Her older sister, Ashley, is lesbian, and her family had been through a huge struggle with judgemental people everywhere for the past few years. Still, she understood that those who don't yet understand are the majority out there, and only conversation will improve things. "Angelle's not a bad person," she told herself. "Like everyone

else, she's been brainwashed, and she just needs to learn the truth."

The other thing Natalie was worried about was if Angelle's attitude towards gay people may cause difficulties for their friendship group. Daniel is sure to come out as gay in the future, she was certain.

Just a few weeks ago, the lunch hall was a grand sight. Hundreds of round, wooden tables and wooden chairs, in a long hall decorated with dozens of pictures showing the history of the College, really made an impression. But now that Angelle has gotten used to it, it just looked, 'normal'. When she arrived at the lunch hall today, she headed towards the usual corner where her friends would sit, not even thinking twice about how the place looked. But today, there was another reason to be excited. Angelle was excited to meet a more senior student for lunch. Maybe she could learn more about Royal

College, and how to survive it, she thought. As she approached, at one of the round, wooden tables, Natalie was already there, and seated beside her was a slightly older version of her. They do look very alike, Angelle thought.

"Hi Angelle," they both said, as she walked towards the table.

"Angelle, this is Ashley. Ashley, this is Angelle," said Natalie.

"Hi Natalie and Ashley," Angelle said.

"It's your first month here at Royal College?" Ashley asked.

"Yes," Angelle said.

"Are you liking it here?" Ashley asked.

"I think I am starting to like it more, especially with friends like Natalie," Angelle replied.

"You and Natalie, do you hang out together all the time?" Ashley asked.

"Well, almost," Angelle replied.

"We do almost everything together, we even signed an anti-war petition together," Natalie said.

"Last week?" Ashley asked.

"Yes. And it was Angelle's idea. She was also the one who started the Princess Spirit club, you know," Natalie said.

"So you're into the Princess Spirit too?" Ashley asked Angelle.

"You mean, as in the little purple book?" Angelle clarified.

"Of course. Where else?" Ashley replied.

Angelle was pleasantly surprised. She thought nobody else took the Princess Spirit thing seriously.

For the rest of the hour, Angelle and Ashley chatted about the Princess Spirit. Angelle was

happy to finally find somebody who can share it with her.

"You know why the Princess Spirit book was written?" Natalie suddenly asked.

"To teach young ladies to treat the world around them better?" Angelle said.

"Yes, that's one reason. But the author was actually hoping that the next generation of princesses and princes would really take the messages in the book to heart, and overcome the prejudices and hate that have been passed down the generations, prejudices and hate that have plagued even the greatest kings and queens alive," Ashley said, looking a bit sad.

"Anyway, it was nice talking to you, but I have to go now," Ashley said.

"It was surely nice talking to you. I hope we'll meet again," Angelle said.

After Ashley left, Natalie and Angelle started talking again. But a few minutes later, Natalie's face turned serious.

"Angelle, there's something I actually need to tell you," Natalie said.

"What," Angelle asked.

"Ashley actually left because she was sad, and she didn't want you to see it," Natalie said.

"Why?"

"She's actually in love with a girl, and has been upset that not everyone likes it. Her girlfriend has been talking about getting married in Canada, where the Prime Minister there has said he will soon allow same-sex marriages. But the families of some of her childhood friends won't allow them to attend," Natalie said.

Angelle fell silent. Ashley looked normal. She had always thought that one must be at least somewhat weird to be gay.

"But..."

"What?"

"But she looked so normal."

"Yes, gay and lesbian people are normal. Everything else is a myth," Natalie said.

Angelle began to cry. She didn't know why. She was confused.

When Angelle got home that evening, she locked herself in her own room, thinking about the day's events.

She took out her now torn copy of the 'purple book' and began reading it all over again. When

she was young, she would read it the way her mother had taught her to. Not that it was the wrong way, but she only applied it narrowly, to her own life and to 'everyday' circumstances. Now she could see that the Princess Spirit was more than that. It was not only a challenge to be a better person, but also a challenge to think different from the generations that have come before, and be better than them. To take care of the less fortunate sometimes means to challenge the majority and the established norms. And if everyone failed to do that, we would be failing in our duty to care, to fight for, and to love everyone. Society had failed people like Ashley, and the established norms and taboos, have kept even good people from seeing the truth. There isn't even enough freedom for people to really follow the way of the Princess Spirit, when it comes to things like standing up against the king and his 'advisers' on stupid wars that hurt people, and when it comes to helping people like Ashley to just have what everyone else takes for granted. No

wonder the Freedom Fighters say there is not nearly enough freedom of conscience in our present world.

Angelle is now a changed person. It will take a few more weeks to fully clarify her new ideas, but there is no going back. She is a new Princess, and she has a new fight.

Chapter 6

Angelle's Big Decision

The inner courtyard is a sea of colour today, as Angelle and her friends entered. There's excitement all around, as nominations for Heirs Council open today. Five people have announced that they will be running for Heirs Council so far, and four of them are students at this school. Heirs Council is one of two ways, and the easier way, to become a Cultural Royal. In this case, one has to be both a member of the council and have enough support from the other members to be elected a Cultural Royal. But this is still much easier than running for direct election as an adult citizen. Most people running for Heirs Council would also be expected to be students at Royal College, as the student body here holds half the votes, as per tradition. Red and yellow, deep blue, three shades of green and orange and purple are the respective colours the four candidates have

chosen, and flags and banners of these colours fill up the courtyard today.

Angelle is feeling dizzy because she didn't sleep well these past few days, and the loud noises from Heirs Council candidates and their supporters in the inner courtyard today doesn't help either. But for Angelle, she has one big decision to make, and it is all anxiety and no excitement for her. Of course, nobody expects a first year like Angelle to nominate, and to do so without proper reason risks being seen as attention seeking. But as long as one can give a convincingly proper reason, it's also the perfect way to get a profile to prepare for future races, and those who end up with the biggest prizes tend to have big profiles starting early. In other words, it's a huge risk to take, and one that may bring great rewards. She had even talked this over with her mother, who encouraged her to go with her heart. To go with her heart...

"I've made my decision. I'm going to nominate this year," Angelle suddenly said aloud.

Her friends looked shocked.

"Are you alright," Jenny asked, a bit concerned.

"Yes, I am. I mean, I'm actually scared, but I think it's the right thing to do," Angelle said.

"If that's what you want, we're excited for you. But let's talk over it inside," Natalie said.

The conversation continued after they all sat down in the cafeteria.

"So you're really going to do this," Daniel asked, trying to look serious.

"OK. Listen. I know it's a big risk to take, for myself. But I can't just think about myself. Since that day I met your sister, and we had that conversation about the Princess Spirit, I've decided that I must take a stand for it. You know, I started to realise that the Princess Spirit is much bigger than what I thought it was all along, and it's something people should really think about. I need to share this with the world, sooner rather than later," Angelle said.

"So you're standing up for people like my sister now? Good on you!" Natalie said.

"People change, you know. I was misinformed, my apologies," Angelle said.

"But you're going to run on just one book, one idea?" Jenny asked. "Will people take it seriously?"

"Of course the Princess Spirit is just a starting point, and I will have a detailed platform, like

everyone else. We have a few months to get it together," Angelle said.

"I like your enthusiasm, Angelle, but Jenny probably has a point. You know, the Princess Spirit is seen by many as a kid's book, just like Cinderella and all those other fairytales of Princes and Princesses. Many people will not take it as seriously as platforms based in economic theories, religious values or even populism," Natalie said.

Angelle paused to think for a while.

"You're right. The Princess Spirit is just where we want to get to in the end. However, unlike in fairytales, it will not happen magically. I will offer practical solutions to help us get there. For example, I'm also inspired by that freedom stuff, you know, and they have a big platform. I think a lot of it will fit well with the Princess

Spirit. I mean, no wars, no discrimination or hate, letting people be themselves, it all fits. It's all about breaking through the things that trap us, as a society, things that prevent us from realising the Princess Spirit," Angelle said.

"Sounds great. If that's what you're going to do, know that we're behind you," Natalie said.

"Thanks. In fact, you are all welcome to join my team," Angelle said.

"What team?" Daniel asked.

"The Heirs Council team, of course. You run with me, and you may get a seat on the council. Once on the council, you will vote for me as Cultural Royalty in return. Have you heard about that?" Angelle said.

"Wow, that sounds exciting. I'm in," Daniel said.

"I'm in too. I'd like to be your adviser, if you don't mind," Natalie said.

"Sure. I need some advice, and what you've provided me with so far has been great," Angelle said.

"One thing though. You will need ten votes to be Cultural Royalty. You've only got three here," Natalie said.

"Well, once there, we can collect votes, persuade people, right? Especially with a smart adviser like you?" Angelle said.

"Fair point," Natalie said.

"How about you, Jenny," Daniel asked.

"I'll think about it," Jenny said. "I'm just a cautious person. But I'll be supporting you anyway."

They say that before you do something potentially life-changing, you should do a good luck ritual. That's what Angelle believes anyway, and one of her good luck rituals is to listen to this song she has loved for many years. Whenever she listens to it, it seems that everything will be just fine.

"Beauty

Sometimes it's just the rain

And sometimes it's just the sun

Whatever time we all need

Something to cheer us up

It may be just the night sky

Filled with little stars

But for us it can hold
More meaning than a book

We all need those little things
To remind us of what's worth living for
We all need those little things
Just to show us beauty
And in those beautiful things
We can see why life is worth living

It's just a little book
But to me it's the key
To a time when this world
Seemed like a paradise
And with it I can try to

Build the magic again

And for us love can last an eternity

And when I am under a

Dark cloud and the storm

I won't be afraid if

I have those dreams with me

And we'll keep on going

Till the great moments come back

And for me the world always

Is a world of hope

We all need those moments

Just to show us what life is all about

And then we can carry on in those darker
periods

So cherish those little beautiful things

And hold onto those great moments

And live the most out of what comes our way"

Angelle and her friends got into a taxi together after classes. Normally they would go home, but today they were all going to the same place, excitedly.

"You want to bring these people home with you today?" Angelle's driver for today asked.

"Not really. But can you please take us to the Registrations Office, on Kings Road?" asked Angelle.

"You know, my job is to take students home, not do this. But... if you're nominating, then that's... fine with me. So you're nominating? For real?" the driver asked.

"Yes sir," Angelle said.

"You would be the youngest person to nominate in more than a decade, you know?"

"I know, and I'm up for the challenge," Angelle said.

"Good on you. You already have my support. Now let's go," the driver said.

Chapter 7

Purple and Yellow: A Force to be Reckoned With

Angelle and her friends had been campaigning in the inner courtyard every day for a week now, trying to gather supporters. Purple and yellow, a combination of the colour of the cover of the Princess Spirit book and the traditional colour representing freedom fighters, has now joined the many other colour combinations being represented amongst the banners and flags colouring the courtyard. However, the purple and yellow team was still amongst the smallest, and was now being surpassed even by teams that have come on board later. Today, it seems that even the red and brown team, which had only been here for three days, has definitely got bigger than purple and yellow, with its seven members.

"Looks like my team is bigger than yours," Jenelle said, as she approached the a dozen or so people rallying around the purple and yellow banners.

"Really?" Angelle asked.

"Are you blind?" Jenelle said, pointing to the two dozen or so people now standing behind her. Jenelle had gained a 'cool girl' reputation in the past few weeks and the most superficial people are now following her around apparently. "We aren't even running for election and we are twice your size."

"So what? Why don't you run for election then?" Angelle said.

"We don't run for elections because it's only for people who want to waste their time, sitting through boring council meetings. But if we did, we would do a much better job of it than you people, clearly," Jenelle said.

"If you aren't running then you're irrelevant and can be ignored. Goodnight," Natalie said.

"Trying to be smart, right? If you were so smart you wouldn't be this loser's sidekick. But clearly you're just not smart enough, so you're over there instead of over here," Jenelle said.

"Your crew doesn't stand for anything except being selfish and stupid, why would she want to be over there?" Angelle said.

"Did you just call us stupid? Let's go and tell the student media," Jenelle said.

"Just ignore them," Natalie said to Angelle.

That Team Angelle is struggling is actually unsurprising, given that all the other teams are headed by more senior students, who have taken their time to build connections. It would

be unrealistic to expect purple and yellow to be the biggest team here, Angelle thought, but if she wanted to make a real impact, she would have to at least raise her profile a bit more.

"Imagine if only I could get on television. I could be like that guy in California who just got elected," Angelle said.

"Yes, that would be nice, wouldn't it," Natalie said.

"But only rich people with lots of connections can get on there, right," Jenny said.

"Yes, that's true. But that's the beauty of technology. The world is changing, and soon people are not going to need to get on TV to be that popular guy," Mandel, one of the newest members of Team Angelle, said.

"But how?" Angelle asked.

"You know, the internet. The blog thing is getting big these few years. You know, where you have a website you can post to regularly, and people will come back to read it again and again if they love it. It's kind of like having your own TV show. Only that it's text based, of course," Mandel said.

Angelle looked interested.

"I have one actually. I'll show you after classes today if you want," Daniel said.

Angelle and her friends gathered excitedly around a computer in the library. They could only have it for half an hour, since they did not have a prior booking, and even had to queue for half an hour just to get this computer. But it was more than enough time for what Daniel had to show them today. Especially since the internet

connection in the college library is supposedly fifty times faster than what most people have at home. It's called 'broadband internet', apparently.

Daniel's blog looked exciting. It had a background of blue, green and pink, his favourite colours, and even a photo of him that was professionally taken. It had entries posted every week or so, and it told the story of his life.

"Those colours are gay," Mandel said.

"We have decided that homophobia is not OK here," Natalie said.

"I'm not saying he's gay. I'm just saying that the colours don't look good," Mandel said.

"So you're using the word gay to mean bad. We don't do this here, you know," Natalie said.

"OK, let's not argue over this. I'm fine," Daniel said.

Meanwhile, Angelle was too absorbed, studying the blog, to notice the argument.

"As my advisor, would you think something like this would be helpful for me?" Angelle asked Natalie.

"It wouldn't hurt to try. What not do it?" Natalie said.

"I'll show you how to start one. And make it look way better than this one here," Mandel said.

And so they started the blog, Angelle and the Princess Spirit. Of course it had a purple and yellow background, and a photo of Angelle wearing those colours, taken in the inner courtyard a week ago, to commemorate the start of their campaign. Angelle decided that the first entry should explain her deep connection with the idea of the Princess Spirit,

and how she proposed to make it happen, via 'liberty and love', her new signature phrase.

Angelle has been very excited these few days. After monthly efforts of recruiting people to Team Angelle every campaign day in the inner courtyard, Team Angelle was still quite small. In the first month after nominations, when every day was campaign day in the inner courtyard, she had only limited success. Early days, she thought. However, it only became even harder after that month was over, and campaign days were held only once a month. Without the ongoing momentum, people became much less interested. Angelle's blog had also helped a bit too, though not as much as she had hoped, at least up until now. After more than one year of posting on her blog and promoting it in every way she can, she had only gathered a few

thousand readers, and of those, only a dozen or so offered to volunteer for Team Angelle. So with the elections only two months away, Team Angelle had only around fifty volunteers, and a few thousand pledged supporters. Compare that with the front running teams, with thousands of volunteers and millions of pledged supporters. Angelle wasn't going to compete with them, not this time around, but she knew she needed more to make at least an impact.

But now, everything was about to change. One of the editors of a quite well known website had read Angelle's blog, and liked it very much. He has decided to run a story on his website about Angelle, and her blog. Angelle gave him a 'virtual interview' a few days ago, which was nothing more than filling in a questionnaire sent via e-mail, and attaching a few professionally shot photos with the reply. The story went up today, and to Angelle's pleasant surprise, it had

brought in more readers than she ever did on her own.

"I've reached 12,537 readers today," she texted Natalie on her phone.

"Wow!" was the reply she got.

It was still too early to tell what kind of impact this late boost would have, on the level of support she would get going into the election. But still, this was VERY encouraging for Angelle and her team.

Chapter 8

The Debate

A few days have now passed since Angelle's blog became, well, widely known. In the internet vocabulary, one could say that it had gone 'viral', i.e. that it is spreading like a virus. More websites, including even more popular ones, had also featured the blog, and by extension Angelle herself, in these few days, and as a result, she has now had more than 300,000 readers. She was now a 'force to be reckoned with', according to some journalists.

Today, she also received an invitation to debate, from a fairly large, though not front-running team. It was quite the honour, she thought, as it generally meant you are now in the big league. The invitation was sent from a group called 'The Rules Guardians', for a debate to be run at the Royal College after classes next Monday.

Angelle summoned her team for an 'emergency meeting' to discuss this.

"We definitely should accept this, right?"
Angelle asked.

"You'd be mad not too. Imagine all the media attention. Debates in the last few months always get media attention," Natalie said.

"I would have to agree," Mandel said.

"And for once, I can agree with him," Daniel said.

"So we're doing it. Does anyone know anything about The Rules Guardians?" Angelle asked.

There was silence.

"I don't think they are that famous. I know that the invitation states that they have over a million supporters, but for some surprising reason, they are not famous. I for one haven't heard of them before," Natalie said.

"So shall we still do it?" Angelle asked.

"Of course. Just go for it anyway. It isn't as if it's a trap or that they are lying, if there's a debate it means that they have the numbers to book it, so the invitation isn't lying. It doesn't matter who they are, either. It only matters that you show the world who you are," Natalie said.

As Angelle was about to prepare for her debate, she realised that there was still one important thing she needed to do. Her family had not been aware of her platform yet, as they had given her some autonomy to figure out the best way to do things, as they put it. Some aspects of the platform may be, to put it mildly, unexpected by her family, and when the debate goes public, it may cause some shock.

Angelle decided to show her mother a copy of the platform. She nervously waited as her mother read it carefully, from cover to cover.

"Well, you know that I don't agree with everything that's in there, but I know you've got to be flexible in the way you bring people together, so I'm going to respect whichever way you go," her mother said.

Angelle was relieved.

"So... can you brief our family on what I'm about to do, in case it's not what they expected?" she asked.

"Yes, I will. We all understand that this is an important start for your career, and you need to bring as many people on board as possible right now."

So that was one more problem solved. One day, Angelle will need to tell her family about how recent events have changed her beliefs, from the bottom of her heart. But for right now, this will do.

The Grand Hall of Royal College was divided into three parts today, Angelle could see as she and her team walked in. The back part of the hall was designated the 'neutral zone', whilst the front part, including the stage, was evenly divided into two, purple and yellow on the left, white and dark blue on the right. Angelle had read about this kind of arrangement in books in the past, but seeing it herself was a whole new experience. Being at the centre of such a debate was another new experience, and on a wholly different level too. Secretly, she felt a bit nervous.

Angelle and her team had been waiting nervously, on their seats in the purple and yellow side of the stage, for about an hour now. The neutral zone was now more than half filled with students waiting to watch the debate, and the purple and yellow side of the audience section had a few familiar faces, mostly friends of people involved in Team Angelle. But it appeared that not only were The Rules Guardians late, but the white and dark blue side of the audience section was also empty. Something looked suspicious, Angelle thought. Or maybe it was only her nerves.

Suddenly, a tall blonde figure dressed in white and dark blue entered from the side of the stage. It was Jenelle.

"So she's The Rules Guardians?" one surprised member of Team Angelle asked quietly. Angelle felt her heart sink.

Jenelle walked towards the microphone.

"Hi everybody, I am Jenelle Lacey, and I'm here to deliver a message on behalf of The Rules Guardians. The Rules Guardians have decided to pull out of this debate at the last minute, I'm sorry to say," she said.

There was an awkward silence in the room.

"The Rules Guardians are normally open to debating with other teams, teams that may share a different viewpoint on various matters. However, as their name says, they are committed to certain values, namely the traditional values that help protect our families, societies and nations. And a last minute reading of the Princess Spirit Team's platform was found

by senior team members to be incompatible with such values. Consistent with their rules of shunning people and organizations who are enemies of their cherished values, the president of The Rules Guardians has decided to pull out of the debate at the last minute, as he cannot in good conscience honour an organization whose values are clearly opposed to the good order of human society. That is all," she said, and walked off the stage.

There was heated discussion amongst the audience now. Angelle could vaguely hear that people were confused about what was actually happening, and the words 'lesbian' and 'gay marriage' were being uttered every now and then.

After school that day, Angelle and her team confronted Jenelle, as she was leaving.

"Are you behind the whole The Rules Guardians thing? You need to be honest," Natalie said.

"No, I'm not a member of any election team, as I've said before. Elections are not for cool people like us anyway. I was just helping them deliver a message," Jenelle said.

"So why did you do that?" Angelle asked.

"You know, The Rules Guardians is about to become the coolest team here, and cool people are attracted to each other," Jenelle said.

"But nobody even knows who The Rules Guardians is," Mandel said.

"Well, not after everyone and their parents gets one of these in their mail," Jenelle said, handing them each a pamphlet. "Goodbye guys."

Angelle read the pamphlet.

"The Rules Guardians is committed to the traditional values that help protect our families, societies and nations, the very values which are under threat from people who think they know better than centuries of history...

"Right now, around the world, our values are under attack. In the past four years, gay marriage has gone from being globally rejected to being legalised in two European countries, one US state and several Canadian provinces, and there will be more to come if we don't act soon enough. In fact, our very own King, here in Pacificland, is leaving his options open, refusing to defend the time-honoured definition of marriage being between a man and a woman...

Angelle suddenly had a realisation. The pamphlet looked and read very much like one her parents recently received from Senator Jashor, who is running for election to be King of

Pacificland against the incumbent King March. One of Jashor's favourite lines of attack against King March was that he had not instructed government departments not to recognise recent same-sex marriage certificates from Canada, instead allowing each department to act on their own conscience. Jashor often pledged to introduce laws to prohibit this from happening, based on similar laws already enacted and enforced by the American and Australian federal governments. Could The Rules Guardians be an extension of Jashor and his team? If so, they had big money behind them, and Team Angelle would be in big trouble.

Chapter 9

Election Day

14 November 2004. One day till election day. One more day of campaigning to do. Today, in the inner courtyard, every team will try their best to secure every last bit of support. Passions will clash. There will be no peace today.

"I have a philosophical question for you. Since you people don't even support tough action against those who threaten our way of life, do you actually stand for anything? Or are you just crazy pacifists who will let us all bow in front of evil, doing nothing about it?" Jenelle said.

"First of all..." Natalie began.

"Oops, I forgot you were all talk and no action. You know, in a war there's no time to talk, losers," Jenelle said and walked away.

"Honestly, I want this to be over now. It's not like we're going to win. You were just in it to raise some profile, right?" Mandel said.

Angelle felt frustrated. Giving up before it's over is poor form. But she couldn't blame Mandel, she thought. Not only were the polls looking increasingly bad for them, the past few days haven't felt too great in the inner courtyard either. Since the debate, just as Jenelle had said, The Rules Guardians began an intense campaign, and was now the frontrunner. Whilst The Rules Guardians did not even have any campus presence, their methods of labelling other teams as the enemy of traditional values and 'shunning' them (but really still talking ill about them all the time) has been picked up by similar-minded teams, wanting to ride on this wave of 'conservative awakening', as some commentators are now calling it. And what

better target to pick than the one already chosen by the team they want to emulate? Purple and yellow has been receiving abusive comment after abusive comment for a few weeks now.

And recently it only got worse, in a way similar to the domino effect. Last Wednesday afternoon was when it all went up to another level. It all started when the American president was re-elected, the very president who launched the war last year, who was resolutely opposed to same-sex marriages, and who won his re-election at least partially on the latter point. To add insult to injury for those who supported equality, many states also passed bans on same-sex marriages by popular vote, making their courts and politicians unable to act on the matter, making sure they don't join the equality bandwagon anytime soon. Here in Pacificland, Jashor quickly seized on these two 'victories' and also the victory of the Australian

Prime Minister one month earlier, who was also a strong supporter of the war and a strong opponent of same-sex marriage. "Clearly people want and need strong leaders who will defend their nations and their traditional values, in uncertain times like these. Since our King wouldn't defend our nation properly, we need someone else to do the job," Jashor stated in a television advertisement repeated again and again on television. When King March came out in support of marriage equality, it gave Jashor even more ammunition. "If a people as liberty loving as the Americans won't support it, you know it has nothing to do with liberty," he famously said. At that moment, it appeared King March's reign was over, and his last minute promise to introduce marriage equality was as worthless as bank notes printed by a failing government. Last Saturday's election was only a formality.

Ever since King Jashor's victory, those who believed in a 'strong man' running things have gained tremendous confidence, and defenders of peace, liberty, compassion and equality alike have shrunk in confidence in a very palpable way. This sentiment has clearly spread to the Heirs Council election too, and it looks like the next domino to fall to people like Jashor. Even worse, as often seen amongst high school students around the world, being a 'strong man' was now misinterpreted as being a bully by some candidates and their supporters here in Heirs College. And they didn't even have to be creative about their insults. In America, after the recent bitterly fought election, some who supported the winning side took to the internet to insult the losing side, people who supported peace, people who supported equality, by calling them things like 'weak' and 'loser' again and again, and worse terms. There were plenty of things local bullies could just copy from there.

"Never give up, right? It's part of the Princess Spirit, right?" Angelle said, almost half-heartedly.

"Yes, that's the most important thing," Natalie said.

"Given the situation out there now, should we actually, eh, mild down our platform, a bit, temporarily?" Jenny asked.

Angelle paused for some thought.

"I don't think so. Victories and defeats come and go, but being true to your beliefs and not leaving people behind are very much parts of the Princess Spirit. It would make our whole platform meaningless if we gave it up," she said.

17 November 2004. The inner courtyard was finally quiet now, after many weeks of drama.

After their recent defeat, Team Angelle was now much smaller. In fact, it's only the original four and Mandel here today. It's not surprising that this would happen, but it still hurt. It's sad that many people in this world only stay for victory parties, and will never help to pick up the pieces, Angelle thought.

"Why don't you dry your eyes with this box of weak idiots' tissues and get over it? It's designed just for people like you, after all," Jenelle said as she and her friends walked past Team Angelle, waving an empty tissue box that had been defaced with the word 'WEAK IDIOTS' on it.

"You clearly think we are important enough to you to have wasted time creating that box," Natalie said.

"We need to reboot. It's a long road, and honestly, Mandel was right. I was only running for profile this time anyway. Next time will be our serious test," Angelle said.

"You're only 15 so there are still many chances," Daniel said.

Angelle saw a boy and a girl, about the same height as each other, walking towards them. "Not more insults again," she thought.

As they came closer, Angelle could see that the boy was carrying a notebook computer. "He's a rich boy," she thought. Whilst notebook computers have not been uncommon for

several years now, it's usually owned by adults with serious business to do, and even here at Royal College, it's uncommon for students to have one.

"Hi, my name is Jordan, and this is my sister Katie," the boy said.

"We're twins, by the way," Katie said.

"We just want to say we voted for you guys, and we support you, and believe in what you do," Jordan said.

"What the world needs now is someone like you. A real Princess, who will never give up on her dreams. Don't give up on your beliefs, or your dream of winning those seats on the Council. Keep the good work up and don't ever change. The conservative wave is only temporary," Katie said.

"Don't you think it's here to stay? Many people think so," Jenny said.

"Not everyone, just those sheep who follow the crowd. Read this, by the way," Jordan said, opening up his computer.

"You have access to the internet here?" Daniel asked.

"The school actually provides free Wi-Fi access for those with computers. It's just that most of us don't and can't use it," Mandel said.

"So you don't have to line up like the rest of us to use the computers. Lucky you," Natalie said.

Angelle read the article.

"The so-called conservative awakening is only temporary, like the very conservative 1950s had to come before the 1960s changed everything. Right now, we just need to wait 10 years or so for this demographic change. The forces of change are awakening, whether it's for equality

or for liberty. It's just that the reactionary forces are still a bit stronger right now. But with more young people joining the voting population, things are about to change.....

Angelle wasn't sure if the article made sense, but it cheered her up a bit. At least it offered hope.

"By the way, you guys know that you still have a lot of support, right?" Katie said.

"We do? Let's be serious, right," Angelle said.

"No, I'm serious. Of course it wasn't enough to win you seats this time, but there's still a lot of people who voted for you and will still do so again. Someone even made a song for you," Katie said, as she proceeded to show Angelle.

"When The World Doesn't Know You're Special

You stood in the crowd today
Amongst so many faces, nobody could see you
You felt so small as if you don't exist
Even if you yelled nobody would hear
Days like these are never easy
We don't deserve to be forgotten

When The World Doesn't Know You are Special
Just remember, that I know
And remember, they can't take that away
When The World Doesn't Know You're Even
There
Just remember it's their loss
And remember, the doubters aren't worth your
time

Cause the World Goes Mad Sometimes
Though that doesn't change who you are
And whatever they tell you
It can't change the fact that you're special to
someone"

Chapter 10

The Board Room

It's another new year. It may be just another date on the calendar. But 2005 must represent an opportunity for renewal, Angelle told herself. The bitterness of the last few months of 2004 must now be put behind us, and we must begin a new chapter. "A defeat doesn't mean that one is not meant for greatness. The most important thing to do after a defeat is to get up, regroup, reflect, and try again," Angelle kept telling herself. "Never give up, despite the odds being against you - it's what a princess would do. If I am to run on a platform of the Princess Spirit, then I have to live it too." After all, every successful person who has ever lived must have also had their fair share of defeats, the difference was that they got up and try again. And what better time to reboot than during the start of a brand new year?

In every battle, one must clearly assess the battlefield, before deciding to make any move. So what is the battlefield like out there right now, at the start of 2005? The 'conservative awakening' may have swept through Pacificland, some overseas countries, and even the Heirs Council, but does that tell the whole story? Angelle decided that she must read about the situation out there. Whilst she had read a lot of news and mainstream opinion in the past two years in preparation for the election, there's a lot more out there to be discovered, she thought. What Jordan and Katie showed her in the past few weeks opened up a whole new world for her, and she was eager to find out more about what people really thought, outside the mainstream news reports. And maybe somewhere in there lies the answer as to what she had to do next.

It's been two weeks of reading everything she could get her hands on, Angelle began to notice a bigger reality, something she had never noticed or even thought about before. Forget those who said that The Rules Guardians will control Heirs Council for a generation to come, and forget those who said that Jashor will remain King for a decade or more. Who knows? After all, last week Angelle came across an article from 1997 saying that King March would be on the throne for a whole generation, and he only lasted for eight years in reality. People keep predicting the future on what we know right now, and keep predicting future trends on recent developments, but it's often not accurate. Whatever we have to live through right now may look very real and permanent, but in hindsight it may look very temporary, something that people made a big fuss of that was never worth the fuss. Perhaps that article,

the first one Jordan showed her, was right. Perhaps even next decade will be worlds apart from where we are now. Sometimes reading things from the past gives you perspective, just like this. We should thank the internet for letting us access things in the past so easily, even though it only stretches back ten years or so, Angelle thought. One day it will be even greater, when we can access things decades in the past. Maybe one day in the future people will read about the conservative awakening of 2004, and laugh about how it had vanished even before the decade ended.

And there's another thing. Through her reading, she also found a potential way back to victory, for herself, for her team, and for all those who believed in liberty, compassion, fairness and everything that The Rules Guardians and their kind didn't stand for. She decide to summon a meeting of Team Angelle, in the spare room of her home. It would be a regular thing from now

on. They would work on their goal until success came.

"Ladies and Gentlemen, welcome to the Board Room. We will be meeting here regularly, after we get to decide on a timetable together. This is our Headquarters, the Headquarters of Team Princess Spirit.

You may be wondering why I have called this particular meeting so urgently. I am pleased to say that I have found a path to victory after all. It will include some reflection, some connecting with people, and some hard work, but it's something very possible. Unlike what some people are saying, I don't believe that The Rules Guardians will control the Council for a generation, or even half a generation. Who

knows, really? But we can set out to prove them wrong.

"Whilst the conservative awakening did claim a lot of victories last year, there is still a lot of strong discontent out there, discontent that can be the undoing of the conservative awakening soon enough. After all, victory is a winner-takes-all game, and the winners just need to do slightly better than the losers to 'take it all'. What an unfair system. But it also means that undoing any victory is easier than it looks, especially when one has momentum.

"Although, how can we have momentum, when everyone is looking so defeatist? When even those who were only decrying The Rules Guardians for its treatment of us at the debate several weeks ago are now saying that we all need to make peace with the same Values Team, because apparently now they are here to

stay and those uncompromisingly opposed to them would be crushed. What a cowardly thing to say! A real Princess, or Prince, will never bow down to bullies. Never!

"If we are to be winners, we can't be dragged down by all these losers. In other words, we have to stop listening to those cowards and start creating our own momentum. Here's my plan: we should connect with as many as possible of those groups of people disaffected by The Rules Guardians controlling council in particular, and also the so-called conservative awakening more generally. They include people as diverse as interfaith groups, gay rights champions, anti-war organisations, and even conservatives who just don't like this brand of conservatism, and many other types of people too. I want us all to do our research, and write down every such group we can find. Then we will decide when and how to connect with each group."

There was applause. That made Angelle confident again. At least optimism had returned to Team Angelle, even if there is pessimism everywhere else.

Chapter 11

The Interfaith Club Dilemma

Angelle was hating The Rules Guardians more and more every day. Her dislike of these people no longer had anything to do with the tactics they used on debate day or their rumoured connection with King Jashor's family which gave them great advantage in funding, it was all about what they believed now. A 'clash of ideals', as some would call it. According to her detailed research, The Rules Guardians was made up of people from various backgrounds, who had a common belief that morals were in decline because of 'weak leadership' from Kings and authority figures, that various 'social ills', including, in their view, the very existence of women who 'dare' to disobey their husbands and the very existence of same-sex relationships, were all caused by weak Kings and societies 'tolerating' these 'deviations'. Of course, there was the unspoken belief that

liberty should be restricted so that their vision of society can be imposed on all. Essentially a bunch of fascists, she thought. People should be able to cherish and live their own beliefs, and we should respect each other for our beliefs, Angelle thought, and people who want the King to impose particular worldviews on society were the worst kind. Not only that, but stupid, since one day the King of the day can turn on them too. She also found out that the wider conservative awakening here in Pacificland was actually comprised of a variety of people and groups, and although some were like The Rules Guardians, others simply had the misguided belief that what they were doing would solve the crisis of declining family values, as if gay people were to blame for the divorce rate when they couldn't even get married, and fighting wars overseas would help in any way, even though it destroyed families.

Sometimes, you need to create your own positivity to counteract all the hopelessness out there. Angelle likes to put her emotions into songs, and recently she had been writing quite a few songs, just to get her positivity running again. Today, she's written yet another one, one she particularly liked.

"Anthem of Idealists

I dream of a world

Where no one has to lose

I dream of a world

Where we can live together

And I will try my best to

Help this dream come true before my eyes

I dream of a world

Where there's no more poverty

I dream of a world

Where war is history

And I will try my best to

Help this dream come true before my eyes

I do believe that dreams do come true

That they can be achieved if we just work
towards them

I do believe that dreams do come true

That they can be achieved if we just work
towards them

If you will just join us and work toward our
dreams

One day the world will be a much better place

If you will just join us and work toward our
dreams

One day the world will be a much better place"

Angelle read the list of 156 groups of people that were supposedly in some way unhappy with The Rules Guardians and/or the conservative awakening movement, compiled from the research of Team Angelle collectively. One group stood out to her: the interfaith peace activists. Unlike any of the other 155 options, they provided the perfect key to smashing any resemblance of peace within The Values Group. Whilst the people in The Values Group had very similar goals for society, they came from various religious backgrounds, and due to their deep middle-ages style beliefs, mostly did not

tolerate each others' religious faiths. As long as this issue is not raised they remain a team, but if Team Angelle was able to form an alliance with the interfaith groups and make this an election issue, The Rules Guardians may explode even before they make it to election day. Intolerant people defeated by their own intolerance, how just would that be. This is an opportunity too good to miss.

But there was one compromise the group, in particular some members, had to be willing to make.

"Starting with the interfaith club at the College? Sounds like a good idea," Mandel said.

"Definitely worth a try," Natalie said.

"Um... there's a catch, unfortunately," Angelle said.

"What catch?" Jordan asked.

"Unfortunately, sometimes when we want success in the end, we need to play it skilfully in the middle," Angelle said.

"What do you mean, actually?" Katie asked.

"Let me put it this way: the people we are meeting are nice people, they are not like The Rules Guardians, but they are still religious people, and some may not like us as much if we talked about marriage equality, so we may need to keep that part of the platform away for the time being. I promise you we will stay true to that part of our platform, and we will fight for it in appropriate times. This is all just tactics," Angelle said.

There was a pause from everyone, as if to absorb the information they had just been given.

"Are you okay with it, everyone?" Angelle asked, particularly looking at Natalie.

There was another pause, as Natalie appeared to think and the others waited for her to speak.

"I'm fine with it. We all need to play it smart anyway, if we want to win anything in life. I can also speak for my sister, I know that she's also for playing it smart," she finally said.

The rest of the group nodded cautiously in agreement.

Angelle and Natalie had sat through a whole session of the interfaith club meeting just for an opportunity to introduce The Princess Spirit Team. "Two minutes only, at the end of the meeting," the club president had said when they asked him for the opportunity. Two

minutes was tough but doable. Afterwards they would leave a box for 'expressions of interest'. If they could get some people from here to join The Princess Spirit Team, it would be a great start, they thought. But as the meeting rolled on, it appeared to Angelle that this club may not have been what they were looking for after all. It was definitely an interfaith club, with Hindus, Christians, Muslims, Buddhists, Jews, Pagans and Sikhs all represented. But it looked more like a friendship club where they discussed life at college, and where to hang out after school, rather than a club for the discussion of interfaith issues. Angelle decided that they should make the brief presentation they prepared anyway, at least it would be good practice, and if even one or two of them joined up it would still be a start towards rebuilding Team Angelle from the rump it had become since the defeat.

"Now, we have a special presentation from two girls who asked me for the opportunity to speak to you. Since we have a policy of welcoming any potential new members, I decided to grant their request. It's your time now, Angela and Natasha," President Jack said.

"It's Angelle and Natalie," Natalie said.

"Well, you may know me as a candidate who ran for election for the Heirs Council last year," Angelle began.

The group collectively shook their heads. It was discouraging, but Angelle forced a smile and continued.

"Anyway, we are Team Princess Spirit and we believe our platform aligns with the goal of promoting interfaith peace in the world, so we decided to, well, tell you about us," Angelle continued.

Some people appeared to look puzzled. Another bad sign.

"We support liberty of conscience, mutual respect, world peace, and tolerance and inclusion for all, something that we believe to align with both the general goal of interfaith peace and friendship, and also the core values of all the great religions of the world," Natalie said.

"So if you want to get to know us more, or perhaps sign up to be part of our team, you can put a note in this box to tell us who you are, what you think we can do for your cause, and how we can contact you. Thank you," Angelle said.

Chapter 12

What Makes Us Who We Are

"I didn't really understand what that had to do with interfaith club," read one message.

"It's cool. So deep, so deep," said the next one.

"Thanks but no thanks to your advertising," went the next one.

"What was that all about?" read the next one. As well as the one after that.

Despite being well received at the interfaith club, or at least Angelle believed so, none of them wanted to find out more about Team Princess Spirit. But that's not the worst part.

What's worse was that they just did not understand the point of Team Princess Spirit. None of them did, apparently. Angelle painfully tallied up the 'reasons for rejection' so that she could make a presentation to her team later.

"A princess never gives up," she was caught saying to herself.

"There's probably no other way to put it. I'm sorry, people," Angelle said at the end of the presentation. There was no point in denying the disaster, she thought.

"I'm sorry for having suggested the idea," Mandel said.

"Don't be sorry, all of you. Those people were lazy idiots who wouldn't think for themselves. We can do without them," Katie said.

"I wouldn't use those words," Angelle said, but she actually felt like agreeing with Katie. There's only so much anyone can take and still be kind, after all.

"Let's step back and take another look at the whole thing. It really ain't as bad as it looks," Natalie said.

"No words will change what it was," Angelle said. "I take full responsibility. We didn't explain it well."

"Learning from our lessons. That's what I meant. Interfaith club is but a small segment of our potential audience, and the most important thing is we learn our lessons and bounce back," Natalie said.

"So what is the lesson anyway? Just not to go to interfaith club again?" Jordan asked.

"Of course that's part of the lesson. Those people weren't going to be the most receptive in any sense, so we shouldn't waste any more time with them. But that's not all. As Angelle said, we need to improve our messaging next time," Natalie said.

"What do you mean by messaging? Like IM, which is short for instant messaging, on the internet?" Daniel asked.

"You really spend too much time using AIM. Trust me, nobody will use it in less than ten years. But the concept of messaging shall be forever important. It's about how you deliver your message to your audience. You see, I have become quite obsessed with observing international politics recently, and I have been studying last year's US election seriously," Natalie said.

"I don't think we are in a mood to revisit Bush's victory here," Katie said. "May I tell all of you that I don't like or support Bush."

"Me neither," Daniel said.

"Focus, people. Let's not talk about Bush," Natalie said.

"But weren't you the one who started this?" Jordan said.

"No, I wanted to talk about election messaging. There's been extensive analysis about what went right for Bush and what went wrong for Kerry, and there's something we can learn here. Basically, there is growing consensus that it all boiled down to the image and the message," Natalie said.

"But Kerry's a good guy and he had good policies, right," Jordan asked.

"That's right. But that wasn't enough. Image isn't just about being nice. And a bunch of policies just cannot be digested by the busy working people out there effectively, for them to understand us properly," Natalie explained.

"You mean the stupid rednecks out there, right? So what do you suggest, lowering ourselves to their level and talking in empty slogans?" Katie said.

"Well, if we are to reach out to people we ought not to think of them as stupid rednecks or things like that. And my characterisation of these people as busy, hardworking people who just do not have the time to look at policies in detail would likely be more accurate in any case. As for empty slogans, that's not our way. But putting our values into simple, memorable yet meaningful phrases, I'm all for that," Natalie said.

"But isn't that just a euphemism for slogans?" Katie asked.

"I think Natalie has a point. Our stuff wasn't digested well by the interfaith club, and we don't want that to happen again," Angelle said.

"And I just want to say again, we don't want empty slogans. We want meaningful ideas, that match up to our opponents, The Rules Guardians and their allies," Natalie said.

"Just what meaningful things do they offer?" Katie asked.

"It may not mean much to us, but it does mean something to some people," Natalie said.

"Like family values that are not inclusive of all families?" Katie offered.

"Unfortunately, it appeals to some people. I don't know, maybe those who are afraid of change, of embracing what I would call 'real family values'. But what we need to do is just to offer something even better. What can Team Princess Spirit and its values do for you and your

family? This should be the question we base our messages upon," Natalie said.

"By the way, I don't mean to interrupt, but I just received a text saying that Canada has just passed marriage equality. Three countries down, more than a hundred to go. We could have made four, if Jashor didn't get in," Daniel said.

"The world is changing, bit by bit. Which is good news. But to get us there quicker, we need to focus on working with the situation we've got. And I believe Natalie has some good ideas here," Angelle said.

Natalie had opened up a new presentation file on the computer, as Daniel and Angelle were talking.

"We should do some brainstorming here. So what do you think Team Princess Spirit can offer

for you and your family, if you were someone else out there?" Natalie asked.

"It's the way to a peaceful world," Mandel said.

Natalie typed 'world peace - now' into the computer.

"It will create happy families everywhere," Angelle said.

Natalie shortened this to 'happy families everywhere'.

"It can help people's dreams come true," Jordan offered.

This was shortened to 'making dreams come true'.

"Can this be perhaps linked to our major theme of freedom?" Angelle asked.

Natalie typed another phrase, 'the freedom to chase your dreams'.

"And not just dreaming of anything, but dreaming about a better world for all?" Katie offered.

This generated yet another phrase, 'the freedom to dream of a better world for all'.

"How about helping everyone be true to themselves," Daniel asked.

Natalie thought for a moment.

'A world without fakeness' was what she came up with in the end. Daniel looked satisfied.

And so more brainstorming went on.

Chapter 13

The Road to Midterms

Angelle still doesn't know how she should feel about the surprise announcement of this year's first ever midterm elections for Heirs Council, where just like in the US Congress, half of the Council's members would face re-election. On one hand, it's an opportunity. Any opportunity is a great opportunity. Plus, 2005 just passed by without major achievement, mainly because there was no clear goal to work towards, with the next elections thought to be not until late 2008. Sure, they had come out with plenty of short, meaningful messages since that meeting in June last year, but without an opportunity to test them, who knows if they were really useful for anything? A campaign would provide an opportunity to test everything, even if they don't end up winning anything. In fact, after the recent lack of success, Angelle was almost certain 2006 wouldn't be her year. But this

opportunity, just to test some new ideas, to get ready for 2008, would mean the world to Angelle.

On the other hand, this announcement was one not taken well by her friends. Everyone's thoughts was that King Jashor forced this extra election so he could clean out some of the seats currently held by the opposition, so that The Rules Guardians and their allies could control the Council. And if that happens, which opinion polls published today in the school newspaper say it could, who knows what the new Council could do? Plus just the fear of that happening and the hopelessness of being 'oppressed by Jashor', as some people are putting it, has certainly got a substantial part of Team Princess Spirit in a low mood. If that mood continued, Angelle really wouldn't be able to campaign effectively anyway.

"Looks like it's going to be a busy three months for all of us," Jenelle said as she walked by. Angelle had learned to ignore her by now.

"Or is it going to be for you? You know, you can always choose not to run, since we are winning every seat anyway, as today's polls say. Not running means not being a loser again, you know. I'm just trying to think for you," Jenelle said.

"Don't you have a campaign to run?" Katie asked.

"Of course, but I can spare a minute to talk to you losers as charity, since we're winning anyway," Jenelle said. "But I got to go now."

"I really hate her attitude," Katie said.

"She's been like this from day 1, so I've just learned to shut her out. It took three years, but I finally got there," Angelle said.

"And The Rules Guardians is really running a candidate like that?" Jordan asked.

"She's been with them for two years, so it's a loyalty reward kind of thing. Basically, she's popular and she's useful to them," Natalie explained. "It just shows how The Rules Guardians aren't really about values whatsoever."

"Why?" Mandel asked.

"You see, she wasn't part of The Rules Guardians until late in 2004, when they looked like winning the last election," Angelle explained.

"And from what I have heard, she actually made jokes about their 'values' earlier that year," Katie said. "What a hypocrite, joining a team you don't really believe in."

Angelle thought she could shut out Jenelle, but this morning's exchange just strengthened her resolve to run again. Angelle decided she needed to do something special for this campaign season, as it's the only way out of such an impossible situation. And she needed to introduce the special idea soon, or else the team will never even be in a mood to start campaigning. She needed the team to start believing, today.

"I need some advice from my adviser, and the rest of the team cannot hear that I am asking," Angelle said as she and Natalie were walking to class together.

"You're always welcome," Natalie said.

"I need one big, special idea. Something that, even if it will not realistically win us any seats, will make the team believe that we have a

chance. And I will need to launch it soon, before they become any more depressed," Angelle said.

"Good thinking. I knew you weren't one to give up," Natalie said. "And I agree with your strategy."

"I think it would have to be something that looks new, big and promising, and hasn't been tried before," Angelle said.

"I think you are on the correct path again. How about using social media to promote your campaign? You can launch it at any time, even today," Natalie said.

"What are you talking about?" Angelle asked.

"You know, MySpace, things like that," Natalie said.

"I don't use MySpace. Besides, how can that help me?" Angelle asked. Angelle's impression was that MySpace was for people with nothing better to do than to spend hours to decorate

their profiles with 'glitter' that only existed in pixels.

"I'll show you this afternoon," Natalie said.

Angelle remained sceptical, but at this point she would try anything.

"Ladies and Gentlemen, today I am announcing the launch of my campaign, the campaign of Team Princess Spirit, for the 2006 elections!" Angelle said in front of the 67 people who had bothered to turn up, as she unveiled what turned out, surprisingly, to be a computer.

"I don't mean to interrupt, but shouldn't we not fight an unwinnable election," Mandel said.

"Unwinnable? Whose to judge that? We won't know until later in the year, either way. But a Princess never gives up, not when she's got other people's lives riding on her success. And there are many lives that will change for the better if we prevail," Angelle said, trying to look confident.

"But what's the computer doing here?" Jordan asked.

"Well, it's our secret weapon," Angelle said as she connected it to the projector, which lighted up showing the MySpace homepage.

There were murmurs in the audience.

"MySpace as the secret weapon?" one was overheard saying, in disbelief.

"The world is changing. And so are election campaigns. Promotion via social media will soon

become a vital part of any campaign, and some people have predicted that by 2008 every candidate will be using it. But if we can get in early, and use it in 2006, it will give us an edge," Angelle said, as she did a few clicks and the screen now displayed the MySpace profile of someone running for political office in the US.

There was careful applause.

"Overseas, some candidates are already using MySpace and other similar platforms to get their word out," Angelle explained. "But this is, in our opinion, not a very well set-up profile from a campaign point of view. Yes, he has a MySpace profile, but all it has are his name and photo, a brief bio and some contact details. He doesn't have our other secret weapon, something we spent so much time developing in the past year."

Angelle did a few more clicks, and the Team Princess Spirit profile came up. It wasn't on MySpace, but rather it was on the Royal College Network, the new social network the school's new technology orientated chancellor had set up for every student. Predictably, it had a purple and yellow background, and a photo of Angelle on it. But it also had lots of short messages on it. 'World Peace - Now', 'Happy families everywhere', 'Making dreams come true', 'The freedom to dream of a better world for all', and 'A world without fakeness' were just some of them. Angelle clicked on 'Happy families everywhere', and it linked back to the Team Princess Spirit blog with a list of blog posts about marriage equality, the importance of looking after disadvantaged communities, and the like.

"Social media provides a platform to send messages out to the world. But the messages have to be easy to receive, and really mean something to the people receiving them. And in the past year, my team has been working on messages that are easy to digest and speak to dreaming minds and loving hearts around the world. This is our secret weapon. The Rules Guardians can offer only empty slogans based on fear of change, but our messages are all about love and a better world, the very things the Princess Spirit is about," Angelle said.

This time, there was real, loud applause. It appeared that Angelle had made a convincing case. She felt a bit relieved.

"We deliberately chose to set up our profile on Royal College Network, because from this year every student has to use it to check their mail. So all of you should be familiar with it. If you are

a true Team Princess Spirit supporter, you should send us a friend request, and we will approve it right away. You can also help by sharing our profile with your friends, for example by featuring it on your own profile. Every bit will help," Angelle said.

Chapter 14

Change The Era

The Team Princess Profile has been live for two weeks, as of today, and has been receiving a steady stream of audience. It has also already made 129 friends, not many, but a good start, considering that campaign season hadn't even begun yet. And it appears that The Rules Guardians still haven't set up a functioning profile in response. Rumours are that they just couldn't get one running, mainly because the page is maintained by the parents of the candidates, many of whom are very new to social media. It would also appear to confirm long standing whispers that The Rules Guardians is full of lazy and talentless people who are propped up by their parents, who are doing it for both ideological reasons and to help their undeserving children get great starts to their careers. Just these thoughts alone have given Team Princess Spirit a popularity boost in

recent days. After all, everyone loves to support an underdog facing an unfair playing field, but still managing to outshine its opponent every now and then.

But Team Princess Spirit does have one social media competitor. It's a new party called Change The Era, who are also running for election this year. Their profile went live three days after Angelle's, and it had the same format to it, so Angelle was certain they were watching her moves. Yesterday, they sent her a message, asking to meet in person, for a possible alliance, whatever that could mean. Angelle decided to take just Natalie along, not knowing whether they were really wanting to be friendly or not.

Angelle and Natalie had never been in this part of the College before. After all, this was the dormitory area, and as all the core Team Angelle members lived locally, they just never had to come here for anything. But today, Change The Era wanted to meet in Room 552, somebody's dormitory room.

Natalie knocked softly on the door, marked 552.

A young man, tall and thin, with shoulder length brown hair, came to answer it.

"Hi, I am Nick," he said as they got inside. "This is Change The Era HQ, AKA dorm room 552, AKA where I sleep."

"Is this meeting just with you, or is there anyone else?" Angelle asked, slightly uncomfortable,

almost reaching into her bag to make sure her personal alarm was still there.

"It will be just me representing CTE today, but that should be good enough, because I am the President," Nick said.

"So what are we here for, actually," Natalie asked.

"To discuss a possible alliance at the election, of course," Nick said.

"And why would we want that?" Angelle asked.

"CTE and your team are both up and coming parties, facing an unjust system, with a common enemy, The Rules Guardians," Nick said.

"But so are most of the other parties and candidates running for election this time around," Angelle said.

"What I think we need to find out is, what does CTE stand for, what is it about," Natalie said.

"Good question," Nick said. "We are for radical change. We are against the culture and system that has favoured parties like The Rules Guardians, and Kings like Jashor. We don't just ask for a seat at the table, you see. We want to Change The Era, change this College, this country, and even the world, into a new era. We want to change the conversation, so that a new world can be born."

"That's not very specific. What do you specifically propose to do?" Natalie asked.

"You see the 'values' that The Rules Guardians talk about again and again? Nobody out there is even questioning if they are good or bad. We will question every single one of them, and I personally stand against almost all of that rubbish," Nick said.

"You mean, as in opposing gay marriages, for example?" Natalie asked. "Surely a lot of people

are questioning that approach, even if it's still a minority here in 2006."

"I see you didn't get my point. I don't care about marriages as I don't care about family values. Now that's something you don't hear much out there, right? People don't question if the family is good, for example," Nick said.

"Well, some families are unfortunately dysfunctional, but most families are there to support people when they need it, and for most people it would be ungrateful to spit on their family, so to say, right?" Angelle said.

She then realised she may have gone a bit too far.

"I'm sorry if your own experience of family wasn't good, but what I was just trying to say was that it isn't the case for most of us," she said. "Just trying to answer your question there."

"You still don't get my point. There's nothing wrong with my family. It's just that we don't believe the family should be the fundamental unit of society," Nick said.

"Well, unfortunately, this is not what we believe at Team Princess Spirit," Natalie said.

"Let's not talk about that anymore. Is there anything else CTE stands for?" Angelle asked.

"As I said, basically we question everything. We also question freedom, what it is, if it's good," Nick said.

"Well, I think you and I can agree that both King Jashor and The Rules Guardians don't offer too much freedom," Natalie said. "Liberty is a core principle of Team Princess Spirit. Freedom enables the Princess Spirit to flourish. It allows people to truly embrace who they are, chase their dreams, and help build their vision of the world. Without freedom, in a society where

everything is decided by someone else above you, none of that can happen."

"You really believe in all of that?" Nick said, almost sarcastically.

Angelle had a bad feeling about this.

"What else should we believe in instead?" she said, almost defensively.

"You know why there's still so much sexism out there?" Nick said.

"Well, the world used to be much more sexist, and it doesn't change overnight. Team Princess Spirit will also attempt to change this. It wouldn't be easy, it will take some time, but I'm confident we can get there," Natalie said.

"How will you get there? By giving people more 'freedom'? If so, you are actually part of the problem. You see, as long as people have too much freedom to choose, bigots also have too much freedom to choose, to skirt around any anti-discrimination laws we have," Nick said.

"But in a society without freedom, we would both be in the kitchen all day rather than here as students," Angelle said. "That's the beauty of freedom."

"But freedom can only get you so far. We need to take control of the levers of power in society to end the injustice once and for all," Nick said.

"I admire your commitment to justice, but I think that's dangerous. Imagine if you were King, and you reformed society the way you wanted. And then another King came along, and used the same powers to reverse everything back to the 1950s," Natalie said.

"Whereas in a free society, progress may take some time, but it's not easily reversed. There's no way a free society would take away our equal education rights anymore, for example, at least here in Pacificland," Angelle said.

"It looks like we can't agree on that either. Not today at least. So is there anything else you want to talk about?" Natalie asked.

"Well, let's get to the practical bit. Our proposed alliance," Nick said.

"Why would we still have an alliance, when we can't agree on basic issues? I don't think we will have an alliance, sorry to say," Natalie said.

"But practically it's good, and it's necessary, for the both of us," Nick said.

"We have principles, and we stand for them," Natalie said.

"I don't think I can personally agree to an alliance at this point either, but we are a team, and I will tell my team what happened here today, the reasons you are proposing an alliance, and let them vote on it," Angelle said.

In the end, the vote wasn't even close. It came out at 119-2. Angelle breathed a sigh of relief.

"Now that it's all done, can I ask you something?" Natalie said.

"Go ahead," Angelle said.

"I wonder why you let them vote at all. It would really hurt us electorally in the longer term, and I know it would also hurt your values personally, to have this alliance. I wouldn't have let them vote," Natalie said.

"Well, the results speak for themselves, right?" Angelle said.

"But people aren't always rational. It could have gone the other way," Natalie said.

"I believed in my team. And it appears that I was right to do so. But the other reason was that I can't decide everything myself. If I made a

decision and it was disadvantageous in the short term, the team would lose confidence in me and it will fall apart. But if I let everyone have a say, then we are in this together, no matter how it turns out," Angelle said.

Chapter 15

Coming of Age

Things are always easier the second time round. At least, they look more familiar, and hence look easier. Now that campaigning season in the Inner Courtyard is now a familiar sight to Angelle and her team, it doesn't seem as daunting as the first time. The fact that this campaign season would be extra short, just several weeks, also make it look easier, although Angelle and her team knew that King Jashor deliberately decided to do this because it would favour The Rules Guardians and their allies.

Team Purple and Yellow also looked quite a bit larger, stronger and more well organised than last time. They had their messages, simple sentences of several words each that spoke directly to the heart, displayed prominently on

their banners, which attracted plenty of interest. And although they were still much smaller than The Rules Guardians, this time Team Princess Spirit was in fact one of the largest teams here. This was partly because Angelle was now more well known and had more followers, as a fourth year student, and partly because they started recruiting early, via social media. Of course, going forward this advantage would be reduced, now that The Rules Guardians as well as almost every other party now had a social media presence.

There was also another reason why Team Princess Spirit is relatively larger this time, a reason Angelle really doesn't like.

"It looks like we may enter the top 4 in terms of size by the end of the week," Mandel said, observing the different banners in the Courtyard.

Angelle was watching too, and she was counting how many teams were left. There were only 13, including the very small teams probably on the verge of dropping out, and two teams that were just puppets of The Rules Guardians.

"Yes, unfortunately," Angelle said.

"Why unfortunately? Shouldn't you be happy?" Katie asked.

"I'm just angry that people aren't running just because they think Jashor will get his way anyway," Angelle replied.

"But you should be happy, because that means you really do have a chance this time. In a few weeks time, The Rules Guardians and their two allies, this team, and Change The Era will be the only major players left. Anyone who hates The Rules Guardians but are uncomfortable with the radicalism of Change The Era will vote for us," Jordan said.

"Yes, I know I should be happy. It's just that I also feel angry, angry at people who give up all too easily," Angelle said.

This birthday is unlike any other. Not only was it special because Angelle was turning 18, which meant lots of speeches, but today there were more than 200 people here, which meant that there were a lot of people to speak to. Angelle had invited all of Team Princess Spirit along with everyone in her big family, after all, so she should have expected this. But it still seems surreal to her. She remembered that ten years ago she was scared that her 18th would be the smallest anyone had ever seen, because she was the unpopular kid back then. Eight-year-old her would have been overjoyed if she knew what was to happen.

"It's time, my dear," her mom said.

It was time to give her 18th speech. In front of 250 plus people, no less. Not that she is scared about speaking in front of crowds anymore. But this would be such a special occasion for her personally, that she felt a bit nervous.

"Ladies and Gentlemen, and Princess Spirit people,

May I start by saying how grateful I am that all of you are attending my party. When I was little I always thought that my 18th would be a very private occasion, because I was simply unpopular back then. So you know how happy I am that all of you are here.

I am only here, doing what I am doing today, thanks to people like you. Like my mom, who taught me the importance of aiming high, of staying true to your dreams. Or like my dad, who taught me the value of hard work, of not giving up. Or like Team Princess Spirit, who believed in me, and stuck with me even when times were not so great. I cannot pretend to know what will happen at the ballot box next month, but whatever happens to me there, I know everything will have been worth it, because you believed in me.

In the years ahead, I want to do you all proud. You deserve something back from me after all, having invested so much in me. I can't guarantee that I will bring success every time, but I will try my best. I will never give up, because a Princess never gives up. And I will never change the person I am, the things I stand for, no matter which way the wind out there blows.

Thank you."

Angelle and Natalie were reading the latest opinion polls on the school newspaper, the last polls before the elections tomorrow. It had both good and bad news. The good news was that Team Princess Spirit was likely to win one seat. A few months ago that would have been beyond Angelle's wildest dreams. It appeared that, as Jordan had predicted several weeks ago, when the smaller teams packed up and left, more and more votes came to Team Princess Spirit. Being one of the last teams not to give up came with its rewards. But the bad news was that it was only going to be one seat, meaning that whilst Angelle would likely make it to the Council, none of her friends would. The

accompanying editorial also pointed out that had Team Princess Spirit and Change The Era formed an alliance, there would have been more votes for both parties, likely winning an extra seat for both.

"If you made it to the Council and we didn't, we would still be happy for you no matter what, remember," Natalie said.

"Really?" Angelle said, not knowing what else to say.

"Of course. We've always been behind you. We've always believed in you. And in just two years' time, we'll get another chance, and it will be because of you," Natalie said.

"I have to confess, I actually think we made it this far because of you," Angelle said. "You've got all the great ideas."

"But they would mean nothing without a leader like you. I could never have been as brave and

bold as you. Nominating in first year? Speaking in front of hundreds of people? That's not me. That's not just anyone. But that's you. You're special, you know," Natalie said.

"Looks like now only one of you will make it. Isn't it a shame that you rejected the alliance?" Nick said.

Angelle and Natalie looked up and found Nick standing right in front of them.

"What are you doing here? Isn't your zone over there?" Angelle said.

"I'm just coming to say hi. And also to remind you that your rejection of our deal meant that we would both have one less seat, and they will be going to The Rules Guardians instead. You need to be smarter next time," Nick said.

"The alliance will never happen, sorry," Natalie said.

"From my memory, you were first to advise your leader to reject us. It looks like you, number two on the ticket, will be the one with the most to lose. I know you regret it," Nick said.

"I actually have no regrets whatsoever. Doing the right thing by what we believe in is the most important. Forming alliances on incompatible platforms is not something I will endorse," Natalie said.

Chapter 16

The Heirs Council

One of the perks of being a Member of Heirs Council is that you are driven to your meetings in a state car, which usually happen after school, once a month or so. Today was the first time Angelle was one of those being picked up to go to the meeting. She was now part of the elite at Royal College, one of only fifty of so MHCs in the whole school, who got to have this special treatment. This was her moment. There were only two things she wished could be different. She really did not enjoy the fact that her friends couldn't be here with her. But they would soon be coming too - just two more years, she thought. Another thing she didn't like was that Jenelle got to the pickup point earlier than she did and was able to make fun of her as the 'late MHC'. But that really didn't matter too much. Now that she was an MHC, she shouldn't have time thinking about silly things like that.

The meeting was on the outskirts of the city, so Angelle had a long ride. After what seemed like forever, Angelle suddenly noticed that the car was now underground. She had missed how it got there, but it appeared that she was in a tunnel. Then it suddenly came to a stop, in front of a giant door made of two huge metal panels.

"Agent ID and fingerprint please," announced a robotic voice.

Angelle's driver waved his ID in front of a card reader, and then proceeded to imprint his thumb on the attached fingerprint reader.

"Permission granted," the robotic voice announced.

The metal doors slid open, and revealed what appeared to be a giant lift. The car drove into the lift, and Angelle could feel it being lifted up gradually. And then it stopped. Before she knew it, the car door was being opened up.

"Welcome, Angelle of the House of Easterner, of Pacificland," a woman's voice said.

Angelle turned her head and found that a tall blond woman had opened the car door and was gesturing for her to follow. Angelle actually felt a bit nervous, this being her first time in such an unfamiliar environment, alone. It certainly didn't help that her family was half a world away now, either.

Angelle now noticed that they were now walking on a long red carpet, and that the blond woman was carrying the family flag of the

House of Easterner, red and blue with a golden heart in the middle. She must have been assigned to assist me, Angelle thought.

"Where are we going?" Angelle decided to ask.

"To the Great Hall, of course. Where the meeting is going to start shortly. Hurry up or we'll be late," she said.

After almost an eternity of walking, Angelle now found herself in a room full of seats, facing a single podium. The blond woman guided her towards one of the seats in the front row, apparently already assigned to her.

"Do I have to sit here?" Angelle asked.

"It's been assigned. You are a new member, and therefore you have been assigned in the front row," the blond woman said, before turning

away and leaving. She left the Easterner family flag attached to a slot at the back of Angelle's seat.

All around her, people were settling into seats. Some were already chatting away with their neighbours, and it appeared that some people actually knew each other quite well. Angelle suddenly felt quite alone, as she knew nobody here.

A young man walked across the podium, to where there was a microphone stand. The house fell quiet.

"Good morning ladies and gentlemen," he began.

"I am Prince Andrew of the House of Mantan. And now, may I introduce, Prince Jason of the House of Wetlands, the Head of the Heirs Council," Andrew said. Jason appeared from a door behind the podium, and Andrew left via that door. The house erupted into applause. Jason is well-liked in the Heirs Council because he has a friendly personality, and because he is seen as smart. But mostly because he has been able to prevent division. But everyone knows that the peace may be about to end, with Jason being 45 and really too old to continue in the Council.

Angelle missed most of Jason's speech because, honestly, most of it was meaningless to her anyway. Many others probably tuned out of Jason's speech too, because it consisted of meaningless praising of almost every empire in the world. Jason really is a smart man, and he knows that some fault lines are better left untouched. This is his key to maintaining the

peace. Yet uncontroversial means boring most of the time. And in times like these, when the fault lines are getting angrier and angrier, and when Jason is seen by most as yesterday's man, to be gone in less than two years' time, what Jason had to say was ultimately seen as irrelevant. As Jason continued to speak, people were chatting amongst themselves, perhaps about the coming Great Cultural War that everyone is expecting now. Not that anyone had to pay attention anymore. Heirs Council used to invite speeches from around the world, and votes on various resolutions. But in the name of unity and peace, in recent years Jason has made sure that there are no votes to be taken. And without votes nobody bothers to give speeches.

"And may I announce, this will be an important year too. After 21 years as the Head of Council, I will be retiring at the next election. Yes, you will have a new Head of Council," Jason said.

The house fell silent. There were some audible gasps. For while this was all just expected, the early announcement meant that the Great Cultural War had begun. Those who stood for tradition versus those who stood for innovation. Those who stood for age-old boundaries versus those who stood for a new level of inclusion. The fault-lines had been getting bigger and bigger since the 1980s or so, and the world was already at breaking point. Both sides knew that securing the next generation would mean conclusively winning, once and for all. With the leadership of the Heirs Council up for grabs, the stakes couldn't be higher.

Angelle, being new to this 'game', has yet to fully understand these implications. However, her parents have taught her enough to let her understand the chances important elections can gift to otherwise new arrivals. This year, she is

going to work very hard to build her team, and get them elected into this place. That way, she will no longer be alone in here, and she will have a solid start towards wherever she is destined to go.

Chapter 17

A Change of Mood

The year 2008 had barely begun, and now there's a mood of change everywhere. This was due to both local and global factors. Locally, the stakes inherent in this year's Heirs Council elections has energised all sides. Whilst King Jashor and his The Rules Guardians allies have doubled down on their efforts in the hope that they will finally control the Council as well as its new leadership after these elections, they seem to be going backwards rather than forwards, mainly because the opposition forces have begun to consolidate support in a substantial way. Suddenly it looked like The Rules Guardians may not be getting their way anymore, that the election would be much tighter than previously thought.

The local mood of change also seems to be supported by a more global version of this theme. Suddenly, the world wasn't as afraid of change as it was, just four years ago. Just at the end of last year there was a change of government in Australia resulting from an optimistic campaign for leadership change. This year, all eyes will be on the US, where President Bush's term must end, and the two parties will once again fight for the presidency. Whilst four years ago many observers openly doubted if the Democrats were relevant anymore, now they are more favoured to win than Bush's Republicans. What a change of fortune. Angelle wondered if the same could happen here. One presidential candidate in particular, a man by the name of Barack Obama, appeared to particularly embrace this mood of change, with considerable success. 'Hope' and 'Change' are what he is all about, it seems. Can Angelle and her team learn anything here?

Angelle is now more determined than ever to expand her team on Heirs Council, after one year of being the lonely MHC who had to leave her friends behind to attend the monthly meetings, and who made no friends at the Council because everyone else saw her as an opponent to be extinguished. She had been studying Obama's 'hope and change' campaign, to see if she could learn anything. The more she looked into the campaign, the more she was convinced that she was on the right path, with her new style of simple messages that give people hope. But one thing was missing, and that was money. Obama's 'hope and change' campaign cost a huge amount of money to run, and it was simply beyond someone like Angelle to fundraise anywhere near that much, even adjusted for the much smaller scale of an Heirs Council campaign rather than for a national election.

"I have a big idea. I want to run something like Obama's Hope and Change campaign, for this year's election. There's a mood of change out there, here in Pacificland, as well as in the rest of the world, and we have to ride on this wave," Angelle said.

"So go for it! I know you can do it!" Katie said.

"But I do have one problem, and that's money. You see, even in this new world, money is required for everything. And we just don't have enough of it," Angelle said.

"How about the internet? That's been one of your strengths so far, and a viral video would be so 2008," Mandel said.

And that was how Angelle decided to embrace the internet video as the next 'secret weapon' of her campaign. The success of 'viral videos', videos that spread like viruses on the internet,

can be said to be one of the biggest cultural changes of the last few years. The rapid uptake of broadband internet in the earlier part of the decade had enabled videos to be broadcasted over the internet with acceptable quality, and several websites dedicated to hosting videos then started up to further enable people to create and share video content. As a result, while the ability to broadcast your message via video used to be restricted to very few people up until even just a few years ago, nowadays even individuals with not much help have been able to create videos that have been shared and viewed many thousands of times.

Angelle decided to make a video for each of her key messages, explaining what they are. Successful videos tend to be short, so she decided to set a time limit of three minutes for each video. She made a total of seven such videos, and linked them up to the Team Princess Spirit website and social media profiles.

Everything was pure trial and error at this point, since none of Team Princess Spirit had ever made an internet video before. Angelle hoped that it would work, but really couldn't be sure.

A week had passed, and only several dozen people had seen the videos. Which was far from success, from a 'viral video' perspective. Angelle did not like it, but it wasn't a surprise. It was trial and error after all, and now it is time for a second attempt.

"As my trusted adviser, what do you think I should try next?" Angelle asked Natalie.

"How about we look at what viral videos have in common?" Natalie suggested.

"How should we go about that?" Angelle asked.

"We should probably start by looking at some viral videos," Natalie said, showing Angelle a listing of the top 100 viral videos of 2007.

"We probably can't do cute kittens. It would distract from our campaign," Angelle said.

"I agree there," Natalie said.

"And we don't want to talk about any celebrities, local or foreign. It is unwise to associate ourselves with any of them, especially as you don't know what they would do later on," Angelle said.

"Good point," Natalie said.

"I'm also not up for dressing up in weird costumes, or lip syncing to music. That would send the wrong message about me," Angelle said.

"I also agree with this," Natalie said.

"So what can we do, then," Angelle asked.

"Don't you see? It's all about doing something special, and something that people want to talk about with others. It doesn't have to involve kittens, celebrities or costumes. Those are just examples of this broader theme," Natalie said.

"Once again, you are the smart one," Angelle said. "But what special thing can we do, that hasn't been done before?"

"I think we need time to think. Give it a few days' thought and we may have an answer," Natalie said.

Campaign season is still quite a long way off, but invites for debates are already going round. This was the most important election season for Heirs Council in decades, after all. The trouble for Angelle is that Team Princess Spirit had received none. After that debate that never was

with The Rules Guardians, none of the other teams want to debate Team Princess Spirit, as they cannot be sure whether there was something wrong with Angelle and her team that caused their opponents to withdraw so suddenly. Of course there wasn't, but it's something they won't just take Angelle's word for.

"We need to demand a re-debate with The Rules Guardians," Katie said.

"But how can we do that?" Daniel asked.

"It's not like they would entertain our request. It would just look dumb," Mandel said.

Angelle suddenly had an idea.

"We should use the force of popular demand to make them re-debate us. The people out there want to see such a debate, I think," Angelle said.

"How can we do that?" Katie asked.

"By our new secret weapon. The viral video,"
Angelle replied.

Chapter 18

The Re-Debate

"Supreme Court Invalidates King's Midterms", read the front page headlines. Apparently, King Jashor's 2006 legislation to create midterm elections for Heirs Council was invalid, according to the Supreme Court of Pacificland, as such a change would have required a referendum. King Jashor has already announced that he is not interested in running a referendum, and will abide by the court ruling. In turn, this means that all seats will be up for re-election in this year's election, including Angelle's.

The game is suddenly harder, and the stakes are suddenly higher for Angelle. Still, nobody ever promised that the work of a Princess would ever be easy, she told herself. Now is also not the time to get negative. For as she had expected,

the video-based campaign to get The Rules Guardians to offer a re-debate became sort of viral, and yesterday The Rules Guardians' president finally reluctantly agreed to a re-debate, to be held next week. Angelle didn't know what they were going to throw at her this time, but staying positive was the most important thing right now.

Better to focus on happier thoughts. Like the conversation she finally managed to have with her mother yesterday, a pre-debate conversation like the one they had four years ago. Last time Angelle pretended to just support things like gay rights for electoral advantage, but yesterday she made it clear that her heart was really in it. And to her surprise, her mother said that she now agreed with everything in Team Princess Spirit's platform. Angelle knew that her mother was not one to change her mind easily, and therefore the campaign was at least sort of working.

The hall was filled with people as Angelle and her team entered. The sight of Purple and Yellow on one side and White and Dark Blue on the other was sort of familiar. It looked just like how it was four years ago. No, it actually didn't, because both sides were full of people, unlike last time. This was a good sign, Angelle thought. Still, she couldn't rule out The Rules Guardians playing other tricks this time.

Angelle took her seat on the stage. She noticed that Jenelle was her opposite, the leading representative of The Rules Guardians in this debate. She also noticed that Jenelle seemed to have a particular kind of smile on her face that spelled trouble.

Angelle waited. And waited. Like an eternity. She began to wonder if something was wrong again.

Finally, someone else walked onto the stage. It was a tall, thin young man, with short black hair, someone Angelle seemed to have seen before. Somewhere. He walked to the microphone.

"Good evening ladies and gentlemen. My name is Robert, and I am the moderator of this debate. I will be asking the questions, and the candidates on both sides will be giving you their answers," he said.

Angelle suddenly realised that Robert was, in fact, Jenelle's boyfriend. This wasn't going to be a fair trial.

"We're already running late, so let's begin. Question one. Just a few days ago, voters in the US state of California voted against gay marriage, in a referendum. In fact, every time there has been a referendum on the issue, anywhere in the world, gay marriage has lost. From reading the platforms of the two teams here tonight, we know that the issue of gay marriage is one where they do not agree. Given the overwhelming consensus out there against gay marriage, why should there be a disagreement on this issue between the candidates at all? The coin flip done before this debate began determined that The Rules Guardians will speak first," Robert said.

What a loaded question, Angelle thought.

Jenelle started speaking.

"Mr moderator, what you have said is very true, and it just points out how the values of our team are the values of the majority,...

Angelle really couldn't stand the self-righteousness in this inherently disrespectful and divisive speech. She knew what Jenelle was going to say anyway, so she decided to just shut it out.

"Now, let us hear from Team Princess Spirit," Robert said.

"Mr moderator, may I firstly say that I cannot agree with the word you used, the 'overwhelming consensus' against marriage equality for same-sex couples. In the recent Californian vote, the margin was just 52-48, after all. Hardly an overwhelming consensus. Besides, new ideas take time to be digested by

society, and people can change their minds gradually. The vote may flip the other way, if taken a few years later.

"But what's most important is the question of what kind of society we want to be. Do we want to be a society that treats people differently based on their status as a minority? Do we, as a society, allow a so-called tyranny of the majority? A real Princess would never allow that. A real Princess would side with the oppressed, no matter how few they are, and how many the oppressors are. As such, my team, Team Princess Spirit, must stand up for the equal dignity and rights of same-sex couples, whether the majority out there agree with it or not," Angelle said.

Jenelle suddenly leapt to her feet.

"Did you just call us tyrants and oppressors? That's disrespectful of you," Jenelle said. "Mr moderator, I demand that she be censured for this!"

"I'm afraid I'm not in a position to judge whether a response is disrespectful or not," Robert said.

"Well, then, this will be an unfair debate. And we cannot partake in unfair debates. Therefore, we should go," Jenelle said, and then led her team off the stage.

"Don't worry, you did nothing wrong," Natalie said.

"I know. But most people are too busy to look at the details, and perception is everything. Given the media, both at this school and in the outside world, are often supportive of The Rules Guardians, I have a bad feeling of how everything will be reported," Angelle said.

"You do have a point. But don't forget that we now have citizen journalists and bloggers, many of whom will analyse what really happened and tell people the real story. Never underestimate the power of citizen journalism," Natalie said.

Angelle saw just a glimmer of hope.

Chapter 19

Team Angelle Can Do It

"Let's go home and watch the results, whatever they may be," Angelle said to her team as the polls closed, after a long day running between more than a dozen important polling stations.

"No, let's go to the Convention Center," Natalie said.

"Why?" Angelle asked.

"Well, your results party is there, of course," Natalie said.

"I'm actually not in the mood for jokes, sorry," Angelle said.

"We're not joking. Your parents paid for half of it, and we paid the rest, together. It's going to be one of the greatest nights of your life, of our lives, after all," Katie said.

It turns out that Team Angelle, as well as Angelle's mom and dad, were so confident that this would be a great result, that they booked the great hall of the Convention Center to celebrate, even before election day actually happened. Their confidence was based on late opinion polling which showed a very positive reaction to Angelle's strong stance in support of marriage equality at the debate, as well as disgust over The Rules Guardians walking out on her again. Of course, Angelle wouldn't know yet, having decided to not look at the polls in the last few weeks.

Angelle sat in front of the big screen, nervous as the results came in. Not far away, her friends were preparing for a great party, but she didn't know what they were doing, being so absorbed.

After what seemed like an eternity, the seat count for Team Princess Spirit finally ticked over to one. Angelle was relieved, at least she kept her own seat. But she didn't want to appear too happy, after all none of her team have won yet.

By ten o'clock in the evening, it was clear that The Rules Guardians had lost half of their seats, and will not get to decide the next leadership. There were celebrations across town. The Rules Guardians was crumbling just four years after its very successful debut. This was really change that was happening, and happening fast.

Of course, one of the biggest celebrations was here at the Convention Center. Team Princess

Spirit had won six seats, something beyond Angelle's wildest dreams. Angelle will now be joined by Natalie, Mandel, Katie, Jordan and Daniel at the Council.

"We did it! We did it!" Natalie screamed.

"I am so proud of you," Angelle's mom said.

In the background, the election analyst was giving his views on the results.

"You know, it was that debate that changed everything. Before that evening, The Rules Guardians looked certain to win at least a majority, and hence control the next leadership. It all came undone for them when they walked out of that debate. Liberal or Communitarian, Conservative or Progressive, nobody likes people who don't play fair, nobody likes people who pull stunts when serious debate is actually

warranted. Their support went in all directions, mostly to more moderate conservatives.

"As for the other side of the debate, Team Princess Spirit, they got a late boost. Previous polling suggested they would win only one to two seats, but tonight they won six. Of course, part of it was that people do like someone with the guts to stand for their own beliefs. But the issue of gay marriage itself, whilst probably still controversial in the electorate as a whole, is becoming increasingly popular amongst young people. And things are changing. After all, Prop 8 in California only won by 52-48. We may indeed be on the verge of major change. Looking at the trend, I can almost predict that gay marriage will be a reality here in Pacificland as well as in many other countries in ten years' time, if not less. I know it's a bold prediction to make, but here's where I will put my money."

It was time for Angelle to give one final, short speech.

"I really have to thank all of you. You're all so great, I wouldn't be here without you.

Today has been beyond my wildest dreams. It's one of those moments where I am glad that I did not give up earlier.

That the debate went well for us, I would never have guessed. I actually expected the opposite, you know. But I just had to stand up for what I believe is right, and that's what we will continue to do."

It was now three in the morning, but Angelle was still so excited she couldn't sleep. So she took her diary out, and began to write.

"Dear diary,

Today is Victory Day for myself as well as for my team. I need to write this down so I can remember how I feel, during hard times that will inevitably come in the future.

It's still a long road ahead. I mean, my goal is still to become Cultural Royalty one day, and that will be a long road. Though six seats technically mean that I am more than halfway there. We have to keep those seats until I am over 25 and also win more, though.

But nowadays I am also interested in more than just becoming Cultural Royalty. I want to help change the Council, this country, and even the world. There's so much that needs to be changed, but a Princess never gives up, right?

But for now, I will celebrate, and take some time out from all this.

And here's a song to capture how I feel right now:

'Love is All Around Us

Forget that day I was so sad

Why did it have to be this way

I thought we'd all understand by now

What's good for us, what is not

Sometimes I felt so powerless

It seems as if we were in

The hands of a fate teasing us

And there's no way we can win

But today that seems so far

From where we are

From this splendid view

Love is all around us

And today it's all over

All the wind and the storms

We have sailed through all of that

And from here we can go anywhere

Often it was two steps forward
Then came the wind swept us miles back
Then we fought more, then further we slipped
Any moment it could all fail
It took five years of our life
In which we did achieve nothing
They said we were wasting our time
But we refused to listen

But today that seems so far
From where we are
From this splendid view
Love is all around us
And today it's all over
All the wind and the storms

We have sailed through all of that
And from here we can go anywhere'

Love,
Angelle,

4 December 2008."

Chapter 20

The New Council

For Angelle, walking to the pickup point for Members of the Heirs Council (MHCs) had become just another fortnightly thing in the past two years. But today, for the first meeting of 2009, something was different. In her hand was the purple and yellow leader's flag of the Princess's Spirit Party. She was the leader of a team of six: Deputy Leader Natalie, Mandel, Katie, Jordan, Daniel, and herself. As they walked together, Angelle could feel her friends being both excited and anxious, yet wanting to show neither, as that would be unfitting for their new status as MHCs.

"So here comes the late MHC," Jenelle shouted, as Angelle and her team walked near. Angelle had never been late again for the pickup, but

that nickname had somehow stuck. Jenelle simply had a way with being mean.

"Guess what, we're a team now!" Natalie shouted back.

"Well, our team appears to be larger," Jenelle said, as she held out the white and dark blue leader's flag of the now re-named Grand Heritage Party. "G-H-P! G-H-P! G-H-P!" she shouted, and fifty or so people shouted back the same in unison.

"What? She's their leader now?" Katie said, surprised.

"Must have pulled some strings. She has a rich dad, you know," Mandel said.

"I don't think it matters who's their leader anyway, now that they are only a team of fifty, might I add, stupid people. The smart ones appear to have all lost their seats or defected," Jordan said.

As Angelle's pre-booked minivan pulled into the station, the team got in. They could have gotten individual state cars instead, but Angelle decided that it would look better to go together as a team. Besides, this was also the environmentally friendly thing to do, something the rising Green Party would surely appreciate, providing a better prospect for future alliances. Angelle, as the leader, sat in the front.

After twenty minutes or so on the motorway, the minivan turned into the familiar tunnel, its now familiar entrance a welcome sight for Angelle. As Angelle had now seen so many times before, the minivan navigated a series of interconnected underground tunnels, then suddenly came to a stop, in front of a giant door made of two huge metal panels.

"Agent ID and fingerprint please," announced a robotic voice.

Angelle's driver waved his ID in front of a card reader, and then proceeded to imprint his thumb on the attached fingerprint reader.

"Permission granted," the robotic voice announced.

The metal doors slid open, and revealed the giant lift, a sight that once seemed like out of movie to Angelle, but the novelty had long been lost. The car drove into the lift, and Angelle could feel it being lifted up gradually. And then it stopped. Before she knew it, the car door was being opened up.

"Welcome, the Princess's Spirit Party," a young man's voice said.

They walked together along the long Heirs' Path, laid out with red carpets just like the first time Angelle was here. "I guess I'm lucky that they finally abolished the tradition of having us carry the family flags. It would have been heavy to carry six at a time," the young man said.

"Wouldn't they have provided a few helpers in that case?" Natalie asked.

"I don't think so. In this economy they are looking to cut costs anywhere. Which is why the family flags are gone in the first place," the young man said. "Even the red carpet is of a lower quality this year."

Angelle looked down. The carpet did look shabbier than the one that welcomed her in 2007. Nobody could really blame them, though. Welcome to the Global Financial Crisis, where financial institutions almost go bankrupt and countless people lose their jobs weekly. The quality of the carpet should be the least of concerns at this time.

As they walked into the Great Hall, Angelle noticed that the golden chairs were gone, replaced by plastic ones. She recalled something about the government selling off some gold melted from traditional chairs in multiple venues to fund an economic stimulus package at the end of last year. The young man took Angelle and her friends to a row of seats in the middle of the hall, on the left side.

"Here are your seats," he said.

"But don't the new members get to sit in the front row?" Angelle asked.

"With the new seats, the King has decided that there will now be a new seating plan," he said.

"But why are we assigned here, rather than anywhere else?" Jordan asked.

"Well, this is the left half, where the King has decided to place what he described as the opposition or the rebels. Apparently, that's what he thinks you are," he said.

"But that's unfair," Daniel said.

"King Jashor doesn't play fair," Natalie reminded them.

"Why are we in the middle, then," Angelle asked.

"I've heard that the more of a bad influence the King thinks that you are, the further to the back you are assigned. So the King must reckon that you lot are sort of OK, and you should be grateful," the young man said.

"I would take being placed on the left by Jashor as a badge of honour," the young man whispered before walking away.

Angelle could now see that Jenelle and her team were walking, triumphantly, to the very front row of the right side.

Prince Jason walked across the podium, to where there was a microphone stand. The house fell quiet.

"Good morning ladies and gentlemen," he began.

"I am Prince Jason of House Wetlands. As you know, today is my last day at the Chair of the Council. So our main item of business today will be to elect a new Chairperson," Jason said.

"But first, I have an announcement for the inauguration of new Cultural Royalty. As you know, anyone in this Council over the age of 25 and has collected ten signatures from fellow MHCs can nominate. But during the nomination round of 2008, there were 55 nominations, and we can only create five new Cultural Royals per year. As Chairman, therefore, I have had to use my discretion to select this year's new Royals, as had been the case for the past 45 years consecutively. May I present to you, Prince Carlton of House Lang, Prince Vincent of House Rue, Princess Millie of House Lee, Prince Rickard of House Bonville, and Princess Tina of House Dinar!"

The five walked out from the backstage, and took their seats on stage. At least these 'thrones' haven't been melted and sold too, Angelle thought. Jason proceeded to crown them one by one. There was polite applause after each crowning.

"Now, to the matter of the new Chair. The candidates will come on stage and introduce themselves. There are a total of three candidates. After they speak, you will be given a ballot paper, on which you should number your preferences from 1 to 3. Without further delay, I invite the candidates to come on stage. Let's welcome the first candidate, Jenelle of House Lacey!"

Chapter 21

A Hung Council

"Ladies and gentlemen, my name is Jenelle, and I would be honoured to serve you as Chairwoman of the Heirs Council. But first, I know you must give your confidence in me. Here are three reasons why you should vote for me.

Firstly, I am the leader of the largest party in the Council. The Chair has traditionally been the leader of the largest party, and for good reasons. The largest party in the Council is the party that received the highest number of votes in the election, the first choice of the biggest number of people. Having the Council led by the leader of this party would mean a respect for the democratic mandate. Moreover, having a Chair with a big bloc of support ensures stability. This should be very important,

especially when the Council itself now has many minor parties.

Secondly, I believe I have the ability to ensure the financial stability and viability of the Council, more than the other candidates. Our party is well liked by business and the government, and we are on talking terms with many business leaders and government ministers. This means that, under the leadership of our party, we are more likely to secure both government funding and private sector donations. This will be very important in the tough economy out there.

Finally, the most important thing is that my leadership will mean the council continues to stand for the values my party and myself have always been strong about. As you may have seen during that debate in November last year, enemies of tradition are ready to use name-

calling and even tricky means to advance their agenda, against the wishes of the majority. As in that debate, I will have none of that. My leadership will mean that the Council will have none of that either. Elect anyone else, and they may even be a puppet of Angelle Easterner, carrying out her radical agenda for her."

"Are you allowed to use personal insults during these speeches?" Jordan said, almost angry.

"I guess they call this freedom of speech," Mandel said.

"I don't care, she can't destroy me," Angelle said. Actually she didn't mind being mentioned by Jenelle at all. Of the two hundred people here, potential new Chairwoman found her the most worthy adversary. That must be quite an honour.

"Now let us welcome the second candidate, Lucy of House Autumnner," Jason said.

It took almost forever for Lucy, a tall and skinny brunette with glasses, to walk onto the stage, as she was seated at the very back section of the left side.

"Ladies and gentlemen, my name is Lucy, and I would be honoured to serve you as Chairwoman. I know that there are three candidates for you to choose from tonight, and I will make a very simple case of why you should choose me.

Jenelle Lacey found her way onto this stage easily, as she was seated just in front of it. I have however been placed at the very back of this room. Why? The King regards me as an enemy, that's what I have heard. Why would I

be regarded as an enemy by King Jashor? The reason is simple. I am the leader of the largest party opposing his agenda to control the Council as part of his government. While there are many minor parties elected in this Council, they are all too young and too small to be of any real force to oppose his agenda. The 50-year-old Real Democracy Party and our red and orange flag are Jashor's biggest obstacle to taking over this place. But I'm not his only enemy. In fact, the King regards most of us as enemies. As you can see, the left side, where he has placed his enemies, is a whole three rows bigger than the right side, where he placed his friends, including Miss Lacey.

Miss Lacey suggested that I may as well be a puppet for some lady named Angelle. I haven't heard of that name and I don't know what she's all about, so that's ridiculous. But I know what Miss Lacey is all about. Make no mistake, a vote for Jenelle Lacey is a vote for King Jashor to take

over this council. He has already sold the golden chairs and changed the seating plan. What's next up his sleeve? You don't want to find out too late. Vote for me and I will stop him in his tracks."

"Not another insult," Katie said.

"Free publicity is not that bad, really," Angelle said. Frankly she didn't really like being used as a political football, but she didn't want her team to get too down.

"Now, for the third and final candidate, Peter of House Waters," Jason said.

Peter was apparently seated in the second row of the left. So an enemy of the King still, but less of one.

"Ladies and gentlemen, my name is Peter, and I would be so very honoured if you elect me as your new Chairman. But why should you choose me? The answer is clear and it lies in this very Council itself.

Both ladies who went before me mentioned that there are many minor parties in the Council today, as if that is a bad thing. But people are sick and tired of the old establishment forces, which if I want to be frank, both of them work for. The two sides may have been at war for decades, even centuries, but people like myself and other independents and minor party members are not interested in that. All we are interested in is the good governance of this Council, to provide good outcomes for young people out there, doing it tough in this economy.

Miss Autumner may pretend to be less establishment, less out-of-touch because she is from the left side, and the King has even placed her at the back. But the truth is that she is just as out of touch. She says she has never heard of Angelle Easterner. Well, the reason is because she doesn't care about minor parties or everyday people. All she cares about is her side of the establishment. Miss Lacey is even worse, implying that independent candidates like myself may as well be puppets of other people. I am no puppet, and none of us are puppets of any other. We all work together for the common good. Miss Lacey works for our current King, Miss Autumner works for the other guy who wants to be King, but I work for you."

Yellow ballot papers were handed out. The hall descended into loud chatter, as people began to discuss with their fellow party members how to vote.

"You're our leader, so you should tell us how to vote," Katie said.

"It should be a group decision, and I would also like to hear from my advisor and deputy," Angelle said.

"I think we should vote for Peter, because he is least dismissive of us naturally. And then we should of course place Jenelle last," Natalie said.

"I think I agree with your reasoning. Any objections?" Angelle said.

Prince Jason appeared on the stage again.

"The results are in," he said. "First, let us look at the first preference votes. The results are: Lacey, 42%; Autumnner, 36%; Waters, 22%."

There were cheers from Jenelle's camp.

Surely this can't be it, Angelle thought.

"Since we don't have one candidate with a majority, we had to do a bit of math here. For every first preference, a candidate was awarded with two points. For every second preference, a candidate was awarded with one point. The results are: Lacey, 193 points; Autumnner, 174 points; Waters, 233 points. Thus I announce that Peter of House Waters has been elected as your new Chairman, with his role commencing at the next meeting," Jason said.

There was applause. But through the noise Angelle could hear Jenelle scream that "it's not fair" and something like "that's not how the alternative vote works". Serves her right, Angelle thought.

Actually, Angelle herself didn't know exactly what had happened. She knew that in a conventional 'alternative vote' or 'preferential voting' system, Peter would be first eliminated and the second preferences from his votes would be counted. But this apparently wasn't what happened.

She had to check the newspapers the first instance she could get hold of a computer. Luckily, these days they are everywhere, and surely enough, Natalie had one with her.

"Lacey Robbed in Hung Council's Chair Election," the headline went. What's a 'hung council', Angelle thought. She read on.

Angelle learnt that the rules stated that in case there was no clear winner from the ballot, the outgoing Chair was to have discretion in producing a 'fair outcome'. The commentators believed that Jason did what he did precisely to prevent Jenelle becoming Chairwoman. Jason has finally showed his political colours, to the dismay of the conservatives.

But the most important thing was that it was clear that there was a so-called 'hung council', with neither establishment candidate having majority support. The term is supposed to have come from the tradition of describing election results similar to this as 'hung parliaments' in

the British system. The implications, the commentators said, is that the fierce battle for control of the Council continues, and will likely play out intensively over the next four years.

Chapter 22

The Offer of an Alliance

As Angelle and her team entered the inner courtyard today, they could see a crowd congregated in the middle of the yard, with a red and blue banner that said 'Heirs Council Freedom Fighters Alliance' in bold type.

"Is there some kind of election going on?" Megan, a new member of Team Angelle, asked.

"I don't think so. The next Heirs Council election isn't until 2012, because, thankfully, there aren't midterms anymore," Katie said.

"But it does look like there's something unusual going on," Natalie said, a bit puzzled.

As they walked nearer, Angelle could see that Jenelle and her crew were actually at the center of the crowd.

"So it's Team Princess," Jenelle said.

"Don't you like to call us Team Loser usually? Finally learnt your manners?" Natalie said, sensing that something was unusual.

"You see, maybe we shouldn't fight anymore. After all, what we are here for today is to build an alliance. You see, the anti-freedom radicals are gaining ground everywhere now, and we need a strong alliance of pro-freedom people to defend our liberties," Jenelle said.

Angelle was surprised to hear this. Jenelle and her conservatives haven't ever been so all about freedom before. After all, they don't even support the freedom to marry for some couples.

"So you're all about freedom now?" Angelle asked.

"Of course, we've always been for freedom," Jenelle replied.

"How about the freedom to marry for gay couples?" Angelle asked.

"Well, that's not really a freedom, it's a socialist illusion," Jenelle replied.

"What's so socialist about it?" Angelle asked.

"You see, the word marriage simply has always been defined as the way it is, people are always free to enter marriage according to its age-old tradition. In fact, to change the way age-old words are defined is government intrusion into long held traditions, and is therefore anti-freedom. The need to redefine this age-old word has come from socialists, who insist that everything that ever existed must be equal,

even if it means the government intruding into others' freedom," Jenelle said.

"So restrictions on freedom are okay as long as they are 'traditional', as long as they are the way things have always been?" Angelle asked.

"Maybe on this one we will just have to agree to disagree. But it's okay, you and your team can still be part of our alliance, as we do have a small minority of people who think like you. I think we can still work well together on other questions of freedom. After all, just like the Tea Party, we are a broad coalition of libertarians and conservatives, pro-liberty people of every stripe," Jenelle said.

"Did you just say Tea Party? What do you mean by that?" Megan asked.

The young man standing next to Jenelle, who Angelle and team recognised to be Jenelle's boyfriend Robert, stepped up to respond.

"Hi everyone, my name is Robert, and I am a co-founder of this movement along with your friend Jenelle. The Tea Party is the movement we are inspired by. The Tea Party movement started in the US, and is itself inspired by the historic Boston Tea Party. You know, no taxation without representation. But 'Tea' itself also stands for Taxed Enough Already. They are all about fighting big government and the way it intrudes into every aspect of our lives, and so are we. I would like to think that we are bringing the Tea Party spirit to Pacificland, to Heirs Council," he said.

"And why exactly would Pacificland need its own Tea Party," Natalie said, sounding a bit disgusted.

"Just as in America, political correctness is on the rise, and freedoms are being eroded," Robert said.

"How so?" Natalie asked, unconvinced.

"Don't you feel it everywhere? And don't you see the rise of radical groups on campus, like Change the Era? CTE is openly running a campaign to make this school even more politically correct than it is," Robert said.

"But they are a small fringe group only," Angelle said.

"But they are growing. They got more seats than your team, and are even taunting you people, spreading rumours that you regret not forming an election alliance with them," Robert said.

"We didn't enter an alliance because they don't share our values. There's nothing we regret about that," Angelle said.

"Exactly. If you enter our alliance, it will show them your true colours, and end the speculation once and for all. You need to show that you have values, that CTE's anti-freedom platform is against your values, and you can do that by

joining our alliance, and fighting against their attempts to shut down freedom," Robert said.

"Wait a minute, though. Who can trust you after what you did to us in that debate?" Natalie asked.

"I'm sorry for that. Jenelle was a bit anxious on stage, that was all. But that was last year, and I promise it will never happen again," Robert said.

"So are you coming into the alliance?" Jenelle asked.

"So you want to close the deal just like this. But are YOU sorry for what happened at the debate?" Mandel said angrily, trying to challenge Jenelle.

"I AM sorry. I was anxious. I am not used to debates, after all," Jenelle said. "But it's important for all of us that you become part of the alliance."

There was a brief silence.

"If we can't convince you, then maybe your old friend Jenny can," Jenelle said, presenting Jenny, who was at the back of the crowd all along.

"You know, I had to leave you guys because my parents and our church wouldn't allow me to be with you. I've been with Jenelle these past few weeks, and I can tell you that she's actually very nice and very sincere about our liberties. And if you join our alliance, then we can be together again. There are also many people like myself in this alliance, people who were once with Team Princess Spirit, but who had to leave because of the controversies of 2004. We would all be very happy if you can join us, so we can be in the same family again," Jenny said, presenting the sign-up sheet with a pen attached.

There was another brief silence. Then Angelle apparently moved forward, wanting to pick up the pen.

"Don't!" Natalie shouted.

Angelle withdrew her hand.

"We'll think about it," she said, and motioned for her team to leave with her.

Chapter 23

A Question of Freedom

Team Angelle was now seated in the cafeteria.

"Do you guys even know what the Tea Party is?" Natalie asked.

"I had no idea until today, to be honest," Megan said.

"I heard of it somewhere, but I haven't followed the news closely, so I don't know very much about it," Mandel said.

"And Angelle, I know you are my friend and you are the leader of this party, but I have to say this. I can't believe you almost signed us up to our local version of the Tea Party!" Natalie said, getting even angrier.

"But it would have meant that we would be a family with Jenny again, right?" Daniel asked.

"I don't care. If that girl joined the Tea Party alliance, she's a traitor and she's dead to us," Natalie said.

The rest of the team stared at Natalie, in disbelief.

"Are you okay?" Katie asked, breaking the brief silence.

"Of course I am," Natalie said. "But I really couldn't believe all of you are so ignorant about the Tea Party and what it means."

"And what does it mean?" Megan asked.

"The Tea Party are a far-right movement that will destroy our future and make life difficult for all minorities. They are people who want to take

away my sister's rights, and I will not tolerate that," Natalie said.

"How so?" Megan asked.

"Well, most of them oppose marriage equality, apparently," Mandel said.

"It's not just that. In America, where most states do not have anti-discrimination protections for LGBT people, they will block such proposals. But here, they may work to repeal such protections, meaning that people like my sister may have a hard time even finding a job or finding a suitable place to live," Natalie said.

"But aren't they for 'freedom'?" Megan asked.

"They definitely do all this justified by the idea of freedom, like the freedom of everyone out there to discriminate against my sister. Anything less is not enough 'freedom' for them, apparently," Natalie said.

Angelle had felt torn the whole day. Yes, she almost wanted to sign onto that alliance to get Jenny back. But then, Natalie was right. She could not sell out Ashley, and she almost did just that.

But it was really not just for Jenny. Angelle actually loved the idea of there being an alliance for liberty, and she had been secretly hating the way CTE had been acting as of late towards her and her team. She hated the way CTE was trying to paint her platform as a more 'cowardly' version of their own. Yes, both parties share goals in ridding this world of unnecessary wars, and of bigotry and discrimination. But the Princess's Spirit Party is fundamentally a party of liberty, because a real Princess would be respectful about the sincere wishes of everyone else, and the CTE is fundamentally a party for

the social engineering by state power of some utopia, that will not respect the wishes of those who don't agree with them. How could the two not be natural enemies, with this incompatibility in worldview? By joining an alliance for liberty, she would be showing her colours, and declaring war on CTE once and for all.

But then, some alliance based on the Tea Party probably isn't the place to be. Natalie was right, the Tea Party, though professing to be pro-freedom, appears to be made up of mainly conservatives, with many anti-gay religious conservatives in its ranks, hardly the image of freedom the Princess's Spirit Party ought to be standing for. From what Angelle has observed, the Tea Party movement often looks like an exercise in justifying and promoting conservatism using the language of liberty, like many others who had come before them in history, using and abusing the ideal of freedom

for progressive and conservative causes alike. Despite the movement saying that it is for smaller government, many of its members don't appear to have problems with exercises in big government conservatism, such as banning same-sex marriage. Unconvincing justifications for this sort of inconsistency, like the one Jenelle gave today, are commonly used. Liberty for some but not liberty for all is not liberty, and joining an alliance that willingly acts to prevent liberty for minorities is just not the right thing to do.

If anything, today's events reminded Angelle of an uncomfortable truth: the CTE isn't going to get tired of labelling Angelle and her team as cowardly CTE wannabes hiding behind the banner of freedom. Now that she's decided not to join Jenelle's alliance, she too would probably join in, painting her alliance as the real standard bearer of freedom and the Princess's Spirit Party as having CTE's agenda but justified with

the language of freedom misused, in an ironic reversal. The fact that she did something along these lines with the freedom to marry today means that the war on the 'meaning of liberty' may have already started. Play it right, and the Princess's Spirit Party may emerge as victors. But play it wrong, and they will be squeezed like the middle of a sandwich with nowhere to turn, by CTE on the left and Jenelle's Alliance on the right. The stakes have never been higher.

Chapter 24

Occupy Heirs Council

"Still not joining our Alliance?" Jenelle asked, as the Princess's Spirit Party approached the pickup point for MHCs going to Heirs Council.

"You know this offer won't be valid forever."

"Not joining now, and not joining ever," Natalie said. "We don't believe in the Tea Party, simply."

"You know, by the time CTE has torn your reputation to shreds, it would be too late to beg us to allow you in," Jenelle said. "So you need to make the right choice, and do it soon."

Suddenly, a state car with the Pacificland flag on top of it pulled into the station. Since these cars are reserved for government officials, they all knew there must be something unusual happening.

An elderly man, well dressed in a suit, stepped out. He read aloud from a letter he had in his hand.

"Members of the Heirs Council,

Due to unforeseen circumstances, the King has moved an emergency motion that the Heirs Council be suspended, and the senate has also approved this motion. This means that there will be no meeting this evening, and also no meetings until further notice.

Yours sincerely,

Brad Indi,

Chief Royal Secretary."

And then he disappeared into the car again, and drove away.

"Jashor can't arbitrarily suspend the Council. In fact, the Council has not been suspended by the King since the end of World War II. No other King has dared to do this, this is going too far!" Katie said.

"Unfortunately, we all know that Jashor doesn't like to play by the rules," Natalie said.

"I just wonder what he has up his sleeve this time," Megan said.

Angelle couldn't be so sure that King Jashor had just suspended the Council for no good reason as part of a political play. First of all, Jenelle and her Party looked genuinely surprised as they

heard the announcement. They normally know all of Jashor's pre-planned moves beforehand. Besides, the senate wouldn't have allowed this motion to pass, if it were without good reason.

"Lend me your computer for a minute please," Angelle said to Natalie.

"She forgot to bring hers, you can have this instead," Katie said, giving Angelle a phone. It was a 'smartphone', the new generation of portable phones on which you could access the internet. Once again, Katie is ahead of everyone else when it comes to technology.

Angelle knew in her heart that something wasn't right, but this still came as a surprise:

"Occupation Causes Heirs Council to be Suspended for the First Time Since 1945

The King has used his emergency powers to suspend the Heirs Council indefinitely. This is the first time Heirs Council has been suspended since 1945.

The press gallery only learnt of the fact that a group of about 200 people had been 'occupying' the underground entrance to the Heirs Council chambers for the past two weeks and refusing to leave, when the King explained his reasons for asking the senate to approve his emergency motion to suspend the Council. This development had previously been kept secret by the police, for security reasons.

The group, calling themselves Occupy Heirs Council, claims to be inspired by the Occupy Wall Street movement, which has also inspired many other similar international movements, all

claiming to be standing up for the 99% against the ultra-rich 1%.

'Here in Pacificland, where King Jashor's administration is totally wedded to the interests of the 1%, where they don't care about the lives of struggling people, especially the youth, it is especially important that we take action. We have chosen Heirs Council, because inside these doors every two weeks a bunch of privileged young people, supposedly leaders of the next generation, sit and discuss the one-percent's agenda, while the rest of us continue to suffer in this economy. We even know that some sort of US Tea Party-like movement is brewing in there, which will likely call for further cuts to government programs and welfare, making even more people suffer,' the group's spokesperson told our reporters.

We will continue to bring you the latest developments."

Angelle showed it to everyone else in her Party.

"I think we should go and speak to these people. We need to reach out to them before someone else like the CTE does," Angelle said.

"But isn't it dangerous?" Mandel asked.

"I don't think so. Occupy movements overseas have rarely caused much trouble," Angelle said.

"Will we get into trouble?" Daniel asked.

"They can't arrest us or give us trouble, because we're MHCs. It would look bad for Jashor," Angelle said.

"But how will we go? The state cars are all cancelled," Katie said.

"We can always get a taxi," Angelle said.

"I will have to drop you people off here, as I don't have authorization to enter that tunnel. But it will just be a five minute walk to the gate," the taxi driver said.

One by one, they leapt through the barriers, and entered the tunnel. Fifty or so meters in, they found themselves in almost complete darkness, because the lights had been turned off by the authorities, as is the case whenever the Council is not meeting. Luckily, Katie's phone provided some light. While the team had been here many times before, walking on the ground in the dark was an entirely different experience. Walking through the deserted, dark tunnel actually felt like an adventure. And doing it with your friends was even more exciting.

They all knew they had to be quiet, as they didn't want to attract any attention.

And suddenly, they could see that there was literally light at the end of the tunnel. It appeared to be from quite a few bundles of fire, on the ends of torches. They were getting close to the action.

It looked almost surreal at first. Not only were there many people moving about, going on about their lives, there were also makeshift beds, foldable tables and chairs, a mini kitchen and a temporary cafe, a mini library full of books, even a medical station staffed with trained nurses. These people looked like they were serious about staying for the long term.

"It's just like Occupy Wall Street," Katie remarked.

"Only that it's underground and in a cave-like environment," said Natalie, almost in disbelief.

Chapter 25

The Struggling Youth

A young man stepped up to Angelle and her friends.

"Hi, my name is Carlo, and I am the media outreach representative for Occupy Heirs Council. Which media organisation are you people from?" he said.

"We're actually not from any media organisation," Natalie said.

"What are you here for, then?" Carlo asked.

"My name is Angelle and I am the leader of the Princess's Spirit Party in the Heirs Council. These are my fellow team members," Angelle said.

"So you're MHCs? Wondering why you can't have your meeting today?" Carlo asked, raising his voice and speaking in quite a sarcastic tone.

With that, Angelle could now see a crowd of people moving towards where they were.

"The enemy is here," screamed one of them.

"Maybe we can talk?" another one seemed to say.

"Should we ... leave?" Mandel asked.

"No, stay. This won't be too dangerous," Angelle said.

The crowd were now all around them.

"Privileged people, do you know how much your College tuition and your regular pointless meetings cost us?" a young man said.

"Do you even know how much privilege you lot are in?" a young woman chimed in.

"Let's not get hostile here, at least not without proper talk first," another young man said.

"There's nothing to discuss with these people, because they know nothing of our lives. They are the 1%," a third young man yelled.

"Quiet!" Carlo yelled.

They went almost silent. Carlo apparently has their respect here.

"So by now, you lot should know that you are not very popular here. In fact, I must say, we believe the silent majority of young and even not-so-young people of this country are sick and tired of the brats of Heirs Council, and can't wait to see it abolished. I, in particular, hate this young lady called Jenelle, who after her loss at

the internal leadership election two years ago behaved as if the whole world owed her something, as if she was entitled to anything. I don't know much about you lot, but to me you look like a similar type," Carlo said.

"We're not with Jenelle's party," Natalie said.

"Doesn't make you any different though. You're all the same," Carlo said.

"You must be mistaken, for Jenelle hates us. There's even a website dedicated to the Jenelle-Angelle rivalry. Check it out if you want to," Katie said.

"You're two sides of the same coin, then. But you're really the same. Just privileged brats who think the world owes them everything," Carlo said.

"How can we be the same if we're on opposite sides?" Mandel asked.

"You're all just part of the system, part of the establishment that allocates all the privilege to

yourselves, and leaves nothing for the rest of us," Carlo said.

"But that's not what I stand for!" Angelle said, almost angrily.

"Perhaps you don't consciously know what you stand for, then," Carlo said.

"Hey, check this out!" a young man in the crowd said, pointing to his 10" tablet computer, which definitely looked too 2010s to belong in this caveman-like environment. Everyone turned and gathered around him instead.

Angelle could barely see what was going on, but she caught a glimpse that they were looking at the Jenelle vs Angelle blog. Apparently they have never even seen it before, unlike everyone at Royal College and everyone at Heirs Council.

"Does any of this matter? We don't care about these things, right?" somebody said.

"I think perhaps we can talk to these people. They do seem different," another person said.

"How are they different? I can't see it," someone else said.

"Angelle's actually, well, cool," another voice said.

A bearded young man walked towards Angelle.

"Let me speak," he said, and they all went quiet again.

"Hi, my name is Chee, and I am one of the co-founders of the movement," he said. "You see, we tend to think of MHCs as privileged people who don't care about us. But since you actually took the trouble to come down here, maybe we should talk. I believe in conversation."

"I'm glad that you are willing to talk. That's why we are here. To try and understand what's going on," Angelle said.

"And I'm glad that you seem to have an open attitude. What do you want to know?" Chee asked.

"I want to know why you are doing this. What do you think is wrong with our society?" Angelle asked.

"The short answer is, everything's wrong. The King and his government only look after the rich kids, those with both the money and the connections required to get anywhere in this economy. He tells us to start a business, but when we don't even have enough to live on and are repaying college debt too, how's that feasible? Especially in this economy, most new businesses go down in less than two years. For a rich kid it may just be a dent in their dad's savings, but for poor kids, if they somehow managed to get a loan to start the business,

when it goes under they will have a liability they can't repay for decades. I could go on and on, but you people in Heirs Council are basically set up for life, so you will not understand any of this, but the fact that you are so assured of a great life while everyone else struggles, don't you think that's unfair?" Chee said.

"But Heirs Council seats are not for life," Natalie said.

"Sure. But even if you lose your seat, then so what? A graduate of Royal College with history on the Heirs Council is not going to go without at least a great job, right?" Chee said.

This made Angelle think. Chee was right, they were privileged. But then, they were working for everyone's welfare too.

"But Heirs Council exists to work for all young people's welfare. Would you rather it not exist," she said.

"Theoretically it should. But it doesn't. It doesn't ever stand up to the King's neglect of our lives. In fact, it's always too afraid to stand up to the King. Make no mistake, Heirs Council is just another arm of the King's tyranny," he said.

"Actually, in the Council there are the King's friends on one side, and the King's enemies on the other side. We have been placed by the King himself on the side of his enemies," she explained.

"His so-called enemies. Too busy having pointless arguments with his friends to challenge what he's doing to us all," he said.

"Maybe some of them are like this. But we're different. We care about the world around us too," she said.

"You all say that, don't you?" he said.

Angelle paused to think about how she could show that she was, indeed, meaning to do something different.

"Not so different in reality, are you?" Chee said.

"Well, we can't show you anything here, right? But you can come to our Policy Conference," Angelle said.

"So you allow common people to help you make policy? For real?" Chee said.

"It's something we're starting only this year. We've only been elected as a team this term, after all," Angelle said.

"To tell you the truth, I'm still sceptical, but we may have a look at this. How many of us can go?" Chee asked.

"All of you are welcome! It's going to be at the Grand Hall of the Royal College, at, um, 6pm on

um, the 1st of November 2011," Angelle said, trying to make up the details as she went along, thinking of a time when the Grand Hall would definitely be available for bookings. "Can you spread the word for me?"

"I'll definitely do that," Chee said.

"So you're hanging out with these people. You know, they're supposed to be the ones you hate. You should know your enemies, Occupiers," a voice from behind said. Angelle turned her head, and saw that a team of Change The Era 'volunteers' in their uniforms had arrived.

"Who are you?" Chee asked.

"We're Change The Era, the only party in Heirs Council that believes in real change. All others, including this young lady's party, are no different from each other."

"You all say that, right?" Carlo asked.

"Well, look up Change The Era and our platform online, and you'll see why we are actually different. Unlike the Princess's Spirit party, whom, by their very name, is all about royal-like privilege."

"It's not! That's not what the Princess's Spirit is! You know it, and you're deliberately lying," Angelle said, angrily.

"Well, we don't want a fight of MHCs here, so maybe it's best that you both leave now," Chee said. "All you MHCs, you have to leave now. Or do I need someone to escort you out?"

Chapter 26

A Quarter Life Problem

"You should have joined us. That way, we can change the world together," one of the CTE people said, as they headed down the dark tunnel.

"But since our kind of change isn't the same as your kind, I don't think it will work this way," Natalie replied.

"What's wrong with our 'kind of change' then?"

"You propose using coercion to change people. You also don't mind ruining others' lives if they don't agree with you. You don't even believe in freedom and democracy. We can't stand for that."

"You know, all this freedom of conscience thing may sound good, but we're actually at war here, and it should be all about winning. Surely it's

better than letting Jashor and Jenelle win, right?" the CTE guy said.

"Not necessarily. You know, it may not be wise to swap one type of tyranny with another," Angelle said.

As they approached the underground highway, they could already see the CTE van parked at the entrance to the stub tunnel. As the CTE people marched towards their van, Angelle signalled her team to stay back, and walk as slowly as possible.

"They didn't let you speak to them?" a guy on the van said.

"They would have, if not for those stupid Princess people already being there first."

"Lesser-evil lesser-conservatives always ruin real progress. That's why they are even worse

than the real conservatives. I guess we have to come back tomorrow then. This takeover must happen, it will give us real profile and real leverage for the first time ever."

Angelle wasn't surprised about how the CTE guy had described them, but this was proper confirmation that they didn't ever actually see Team Princess's Spirit as allies.

"Now that they are gone, it's time to head back in," Angelle told her team.

As Team Angelle headed back into the Occupy area, they could hear track after track of familiar music being played. Angelle noticed that it was all music that was popular around

the late 1990s. As they got nearer, Angelle also noticed that people were all getting up and dancing.

"It seems we're in luck. This time there'll be no need to negotiate, we can just dance our way into the center of the action," she said.

"I like this track," Angelle could hear someone screaming as a new track came on. Angelle gave the signal for her team to start dancing.

As expected, the crowd was so involved in the music that Team Angelle easily swam their way into the heart of the Occupy area. It was actually much bigger than they previously thought it was. And right now, the center of attention was actually a DJ with a portable DJ-ing kit, connected to several loudspeakers. This was the source of the music.

When the track stopped, Angelle stepped up to the DJ.

"So you have a request?" he said.

"Not really, Mr DJ. You see, I am new here, and I want to know why you are playing all this 90s music," Angelle said.

"So you don't have a request?"

The DJ picked up his mic.

"No further requests? Then my work here is done for now! Thank you people!" he shouted.

"By the way, you just missed out on a big party, girl," the DJ said.

"What party?" Angelle asked.

"You don't know? I see, you're really new to Occupy. Every other day at six in the evening we play some 90s music, to cheer up. Obviously we missed the last time because I was sick, so if you

arrived here in the last four days you wouldn't know what I'm talking about," he said.

"But why 90s music?" she asked.

"It all began with the 90s appreciation group. You see, the 90s appreciation group is all about 90s culture," he said.

"So there's a dedicated 90s appreciation group? Is there a dedicated appreciation group for other decades as well?" she asked.

"Of course not. The 90s were the best, simply. But it may just be our view of things," he said.

"Why?" she asked.

"I guess it was because we were kids back then, and life was easier and better. I mean, this whole 90s appreciation thing started with several guys going through a quarter life crisis and trying to get their mood up using 90s music," he said.

"What's a quarter life crisis?" Angelle asked. She had heard of a mid-life crisis, but not this one.

"It's somewhat like a mid-life crisis, but it happens in your 20s or early 30s. It's all about dissatisfaction in life, thinking that you could do better but not knowing how to get there, and often a severe fear of permanent failure.

There's also the fear that the decisions you make now will trap you forever in the future, especially with everything being so hard to achieve nowadays," he said.

"And is it a common thing?" she asked.

"It's probably very common here, you know, dissatisfied people come to Occupy more than anyone else. But apparently a recent study found that about a third of young adults have similar problems. The bottom line is that, we are a generation who were raised to dream big, and yet many of us can't even do as well as our parents did back then," he said.

"So the 90s thing is like, escapism, right?" she asked.

"I guess you could say that, but I wouldn't put it so simply. You see, once upon a time, we had hope in life, and life was more, well, magical. We want to revisit the past to bring back some of this magic, I guess," he said.

This sounds like a real problem that needed solving, Angelle thought. Maybe the Princess's Spirit could help. But she needed to talk with these troubled young adults first, and maybe introduce them to the Princess's Spirit ideas.

"So you people like 90s stuff. Guess what? I love 90s stuff too. Why don't we have a 90s party some time?" Angelle offered.

"But we have Occupy now, and we can't go anywhere for now," he said.

"It would just be an evening," she said.

"Maybe it'll work, thinking about it. We do need a break from this cave-like existence," he said.

"Give me your e-mail and we can organise it together," she said.

Chapter 27

The Princess's Spirit Vision of Freedom

The Grand Hall is all decked out in yellow and purple, and Angelle and her friends are sitting on the stage, waiting for the clock to strike six, when the doors will open.

"How many people do you think are coming?"
Katie asks.

Angelle can't give a confident answer. In fact, in the current political climate, she can't be sure that more than a few are interested. Still, it is important to keep team morale up.

"Maybe about half the hall?"

Angelle's original fears were unfounded. In fact, the hall almost filled up, to her surprise. She even recognised a few faces from the Occupy movement. She couldn't tell whether this would be a good thing or not, however, as Occupy had now become synonymous with CTE.

"Good evening ladies and gentlemen," Angelle began, slightly nervously.

"Welcome to the Princess's Spirit Party's policy conference. This is a process in which we invite you to tell us all about your values, concerns and aspirations, so that we can better tailor our policies to people's needs. To this end, a questionnaire has been provided on your seats, and we wish you could take the time to fill it out after my speech. Afterwards, please drop it off at the big box provided in the refreshments area. By the way, I'm also aware that many of your friends who might have wanted to come

this evening couldn't, so this speech will also be available as an online video. No serious contender in modern politics would miss doing this, I'm sure you're aware by now.

But first, I want to outline my vision, and what I am doing in public life. Put it simply, my vision has always been one of a society where people have the opportunity to live the lives they want to, and live by the values they believe in. The Princess's Spirit is all about both standing up for what you believe in, and helping others become able to do so, too.

The core of the Princess's Spirit platform lies in the idea of freedom. No, I'm not talking about the kind of freedom the Grand Heritage Party talks about all the time. Looking at the concept of freedom from a Princess's Spirit perspective, since a Real Princess must care about everyone, our concept of freedom means we care equally

about everyone's freedom. A Real Princess simply cannot accept the idea that minorities or the economically poor must naturally have less freedom. A truly free society is not just about the freedom of your boss to fire you at will or the freedom of your local cafe to refuse to serve gay people. A truly free society also cares about the freedom of individuals to not become economic slaves or to be locked out of society just because of their sexuality. Our platform therefore specifically states that we support policies to address these issues. I must admit that, just a few years ago, even I myself was unaware of the systematic disadvantage so many people faced in society. I believe that, being the privileged people that we are, many of my fellow MHCs simply don't understand the reality out there. But I have been made to understand it, and I have been moved to be passionate about the need to correct for it. Liberty for only a few is not real liberty, after all.

On the other hand, the idea of freedom also means respect for everyone's freedom of conscience. So we oppose, for example, campaigns to make people miserable or even lose their jobs just because they appear to support a different political point of view. While we may not agree with everything in life, as a Real Princess always stands up for her own beliefs, she surely understands that others would also do so. So as long as their opponents fight fair, a Real Princess would always treat them in a fair and dignified way.

Furthermore, in a truly free society, one would be able to always be true to oneself. There would be no need to take sides and be loyal to one ideological faction or another because they appear to 'treat you better' than the other factions. In a truly free society, freedom and opportunity should be guaranteed for everyone, so there's no need for this. Therefore, our party doesn't align with one form of ideological social

engineering or another, it simply represents freedom and opportunity for all. We are here to build a society of real freedom and opportunity, not to socially engineer any particular ideological utopia.

But believe me, being true to these ideals is difficult. It has always been difficult. For example, our early stances against unnecessary wars and for the freedom of same-sex couples to marry as they wish have attracted bitterness from some conservatives, even though we are not exactly getting in the way of their lives. More recently, we have often been caught in the crossfires of the culture wars, the conservatives still putting up their old objections to us, while some self-styled progressives claim that we are not doing enough for equality. But we believe that we must achieve equality while promoting and respecting the concept of freedom too, as history has shown us that without freedom

there can never be equality in any sense. Still, it is tough to be where we are. But what would a Real Princess do? She would stay true to her values and fight to the very end for her vision. So that's what we will do.

The goal of today's conference is simple: to gather your thoughts on what you think about our vision of freedom and opportunity, and to source recommendations for specific policies we should implement towards this vision. Your questionnaire responses will be very useful to us. Thank you."

There was applause. Angelle waited for the booing, but there was none.

"Look, there's Chee and Carlo," Natalie said, as they walked towards the refreshments area on the right side of the Great Hall.

"Hi Chee, I'm glad you came. And hello to you too, Carlo," Angelle said.

"Did you like our message?" Natalie asked.

"Yes, indeed. You know, Occupy was all about real freedom and opportunity too. I hope that you will be able to achieve what Occupy could not," Chee said.

"What do you mean?" Katie asked.

"Occupy was supposed to be about freedom, and it was that way until CTE took over it. I guess our lack of structure made us vulnerable to the takeover. Anyway, by the time I quit, Occupy Heirs Council was nothing like the way it started out," Chee said.

"So you quit?" Mandel asked.

"What else could we do? The membership had become 80% CTE by then, as their people kept joining and our people kept leaving. We started all this because the system was failing us, and we simply wanted our fair opportunity in life. It was that simple. But then, it became all about CTE's imaginary utopia. It seems that they are so dedicated to their weird utopia that they are willing to trample over our one chance to get some equal opportunity. I don't think that kind of utopia is worth having, especially if that's the price," Carlo said.

"I agree. Nobody's utopia is ever worth having, if it means actual continuing injustice to people in practice," Angelle said.

"I'm glad somebody has said that. You're an inspiration to many of us, you know? In fact, here in your audience tonight are many former Occupiers who had also quit. I think they like your message too, although maybe some are just supporting you to get back at the party who stole their movement. Anyway, we all regret

telling you to go away when you came back that day and tried to warn us about CTE's plan for hostile takeover," Carlo said.

"But, maybe this is a stupid question, but how did CTE come to control Occupy, when the two weren't that related in the first place?" Katie asked.

"I guess they set their sights on taking over Occupy early on, because we were about change and overcoming oppression and solidarity, the sort of thing they profess to be about. We were valuable to them, because we were visible, and because we were authentic. It was pure political calculation," Chee said.

"But even if they wanted to take over Occupy, wouldn't that have been difficult? You were a big mass of people in your own right, I mean," Mandel said.

"They had all sorts of, well, techniques. First they introduced the so-called progressive stack at our daily forums, a system also used in some overseas Occupy movements. This system prioritised the speaking rights of those with less privilege, like women, people of color or LGBTs above others, and a moderator would control the speaking order based on privilege. I don't know how it worked overseas, maybe they really had impartial moderators, but in our case, the moderators were all CTE people, and in practice used it to select CTE speakers. Everyone who didn't agree with their agenda left, because we felt ignored," Chee said.

"And it wasn't just, you know, people with privilege. In fact, the first person to protest against this system was gay himself. He not only felt ignored like the rest of us, he felt angry that CTE was using his identity to support an agenda he did not personally agree with. For example, he felt that the CTE LGBT team, who came to speak almost every day, had a completely

different agenda to himself and his friends, yet they claimed to speak for LGBTs in general," Carlo said.

"Sounds like a tricky situation. Is there any way we can help get Occupy back on track?" Mandel asked.

"It's all over now anyway. Jashor has activated emergency powers, allowing him to clean up the mess Occupy has become next week. We're not sorry to see it go. We're just sorry that the emergency powers mean that Jashor's term will be extended by one year and that we can't get rid of him until 2013," Chee said.

"What?" Natalie asked, surprised.

"It was announced one hour ago, apparently," Katie said, reading from her phone.

Chapter 28

Culture Wars

There's about a year before the next elections, and the first opinion polls that came out last week did not have good news for the Princess's Spirit Party. They showed that the Grand Heritage Party and Change The Era were the two major parties at this point in the race, and Angelle's party was not even a major force. Angelle couldn't even know how her party was actually performing, as it was just included in a combined 'others' category. All she knew was that this cannot be good news.

Still, she has to do something to raise her profile, even in this early stage, to tell everyone that she is still in the race. So today, Team Angelle is going into the Inner Courtyard, raising their yellow and purple banners, and spreading their message to whoever wants to listen.

As they entered the Inner Courtyard, Angelle noticed that there was already plenty of yelling. She became worried that, even with the help of the loudspeaker she had brought along with her, nobody would hear her properly.

"We stand with Occupy! Boycott all pro-Jashor businesses!" a voice was yelling, over and over again.

"That's CTE and Occupy gone mad! But don't worry, we will stand for freedom!" Jenelle yelled back.

"Yeah, the freedom for women, minorities and LGBT people to continue to be oppressed!" CTE shouted back.

Angelle reflected on the sad state of both Heirs Council politics and Pacificland politics more

generally right now. Discussion had descended into a war-like stage, with nothing constructive being done. The people are fed up, but nothing is changing. Many people know that the Grand Heritage Party was not offering real freedom, but just their own version of 'freedom'. But the other team in this war are no better, it seems. Occupy started out being about the concerns of disaffected young people, but somehow CTE took it over, and it became part of the CTE's war machine. At first, Occupiers started encouraging the boycotting of businesses that treated their employees poorly, something in line with the whole point of Occupy in the first place, and something that quite a few people were sympathetic about. But soon after, it became all about the CTE's cultural agenda, justified vaguely as 'justice'. There was a campaign to boycott businesses that have donated to King Jashor's political party, there was another campaign to boycott businesses that didn't employ enough women, and there was even one about voting to eliminate a reality TV show

contestant who opposed same-sex marriage, as if that would be 'justice' or it would change anything at all. Many people were truly fed up. It's not that people don't care about equality or justice. It's just that many people didn't believe this to be the way to go about it.

And apparently, that was not just the state of affairs in Pacificland right now, in the early 2010s. Similar situations are now found everywhere. Europe, England, the US, Australia, absolutely everywhere. Immigration, climate policy, LGBT rights, feminism, if you can name a divisive issue, it's likely to be caught up in a state of ideological wars with no good prospect of resolution. The deep and permanent divisions have prevented both sides from finding any common ground that is necessary for a good resolution, in any case.

Angelle believes that the Princess's Spirit platform can be the best circuit breaker to all this. Real freedom and opportunity for all, genuine concern for those doing it tough, and frank and rational discussions to resolve differences are what we need now. A Real Princess would stand up and proclaim these values, and use them to unite people. Yet she has been careful to act recently, not wanting to be forced to take sides on issues, or to be forced into 'alliances' that will ultimately damage her image. Local and international experience in recent times have shown that these things can happen all too easily. In these days of media sound bites, words are often taken out of context, and ideas are often distorted. And once an impression has set in, there's no use to argue otherwise.

But one cannot hide away forever either, or one would just become irrelevant. So it's time to take a stand, no matter how high the stakes are,

Angelle thought. She picked up her loudspeaker.

"Are you sick and tired of these culture wars? I am! There's an alternative: real freedom and opportunity for all! That's the only ideology we need!" she shouted, several times over, until she noticed that she was the only one shouting.

Both the CTE and the GHP had gone quiet, and people were staring at the small island of yellow and purple with Angelle in the center. For the first time in months, maybe even more than a year, there was somebody who was standing up to the 'two majors', condemning both sides for waging the war in the first place, rather than simply taking one side or the other. As Angelle noticed that people were listening to her, she used this rare opportunity to continue speaking.

"In this world, we all have hopes and dreams. We all want an opportunity to see our hopes and dreams come true, and we all want a fair playing field to support this to happen. This state of culture war not only doesn't change anything for anybody, it creates a divided platform. A platform on which people must choose one side or the other, sometimes merely because we believe one side will treat us slightly better than the other side, even if neither will offer us true freedom to be true to ourselves, and to pursue our dreams in life. And amongst this division and war, the truly heartfelt stories of people, people doing it tough in their everyday lives, are all too easily drowned out by shouting matches like the one we've just had. But there's an alternative: why don't we just put this culture war stuff aside, and come together to create a situation of real freedom and opportunity for all?" she said.

There was both applause and booing. Angelle couldn't tell which was louder.

"This young lady is misguided! The culture wars can't simply be imagined away. People are being oppressed. We must fight to win it!" CTE shouted.

Angelle really wanted to shout back, but instead signalled for her team to leave. She didn't want to get caught up in any more controversy. The battle for hearts and minds wouldn't be won in one day, anyway.

Chapter 29

Back in a Better Time

It's been four months since Angelle tried to organise a 90s-themed party with DJ Ken-Men-Pen, or just Ken for short, but she's still searching for the most important thing: a venue. Before Christmas all the venues were booked up by Christmas parties, but apparently in January they also close for a month or so, maybe because they had already made so much money.

"Hey, I've found an affordable place for your party," Jordan said.

"No, I found it first," Megan said.

"Okay, whatever. But do check this out, it's actually an underground shelter," Jordan said.

Angelle read the description. The shelter is in a suburb about 20 kilometers away, and is actually brand new. It was built for the end of the world. The ancient Mayans believed that the world will come to an end this December, apparently, and these people built the shelter for their paid clients to hide in come late December. Between now and then, however, it was available to hire as a venue for functions. And just for 200 dollars an evening!

"Ladies and gentlemen,

Welcome to the 90s Spirit Party. I'm your host, DJ-Ken-Men-Pen. Thinking about it, 2012 is indeed a scary time to be in. Some people believe the end of the world is coming later this year, it is the very reason why this shelter was

built. Thankfully, there's always music, decorations, fashion and food to help us rewind back about 15 years, to the good old times," Ken said.

"But let's face it. We'll need to come back to 2012 by tomorrow morning. But don't despair yet, we've got a way to keep some of the magic of this night alive for a long time to come. There's a big blank poster on the wall on the left-hand side, where we invite you to think about what was so good about the 90s. Write down whatever comes to your mind. At the end of the night, we'll take a high resolution photo of the whole thing, and let you take it home on a USB stick for just five dollars," Angelle said.

"Without further delay, let the party begin!" Ken said, starting the music.

As the other forty or so people partied on into the night, Angelle and her friends went over to the left wall, to inspect the previously blank poster, now more than half filled with written comments.

"Now, let's get down to our real business here tonight," Natalie said.

"Aren't we here to have fun too?" Katie said.

"You all know this is a marketing research exercise," Natalie said.

"Don't be so cynical, it's a bit of fun too. And I don't like the term marketing research, I prefer idea gathering," Angelle said.

They all read the poster together, comment by comment.

"It was more hopeful," read one.

"Everything was right then, everything is wrong now," read another.

"It was before the economy crashed," the next one read.

"We dreamt of such a bright future, for all of us," read the next one.

One comment caught Angelle's eye in particular: "Back in the 90s, we all got along, people could be friends. Nowadays everything is divided into factions, the social justice warriors vs the angry reactionaries, the green foot soldiers versus the climate sceptics, pro-gay versus anti-gay, the religious vs the atheists, and so on. I wish this would all end soon, and we can all be friends again."

And then there was another one: "In the 90s, battle lines were drawn on things like pop vs rock, or country vs hip-hop. Otherwise, people were friendly with each other. Nowadays, every issue is a battleground, and every opinion can be a cause for war. When will this madness end?"

"It appears to be all about being more hopeful back then, and the fact that people got along better back then," Katie said.

"That's the vibe I get too," Natalie said.

"What else would you have expected? That people simply like the 90s for its terrible fashion or its outdated computers?" Jordan said.

"The fashion wasn't really that bad, come on" Katie said.

"Should I make this the theme of my speech?" Angelle asked.

"I think it would be a good idea. Of course we should record it and have it online too," Natalie said.

"Ladies and Gentlemen, attention please. Our special guest of the night, Angelle Easterner MHC, would like to give a special speech," Ken said.

"Good evening again everybody,

It's my honour to be the special guest at this great party. You know, I love the 90s too.

But what's so great about the 90s? The fashion, the music, even those outdated computers we

used to use? These things are great, well probably not Windows 98 computers, but the other things were definitely great. But what a lot of us miss is how life used to be, and what the world looked like to us.

In the 90s, the world was more hopeful. Maybe part of it is the fact that many of us were brought up with the adults telling us that we were all special, that we could do anything we want. If that's the case, then it's the fault of the system that it is failing so many of us today. On the other hand, it is a fact that the world was less divided and less bitterly resentful in so many different ways back then. Sure, there were culture wars even back then, but surely not as toxic as the ones we are having today. It's why I believe we need to rise above the current divisiveness. Remember, while things don't look that good at the moment in many ways, they don't have to be this way. The dreams we had

back then still resonate, and they still have a good chance of coming true.

Anyway, while I love the 90s too, I look forward to a future that's even better. It's why I'm in public life in the first place. To work towards a better future. And I believe, if we keep the hope alive, we will get there eventually.

Thank you."

Chapter 30

We Have More In Common Than We Think

Things are looking up for Angelle. Her recent speeches on her vision of freedom and dreams for all have been popular with quite a lot of people from many different backgrounds, and she has become a somewhat popular figure for the hopeless in society to rally around. Among the ranks of new Angelle supporters are many previous Occupiers, as well as other youth facing tough times in life. On the other hand, her message also struck a chord with those apparently doing well in life, but actually feeling limited by their circumstances, such as a less than meaningful existence or an inability to really follow their heart and pursue their dreams. And finally, there are those whose vision for life focus less on themselves and more

on the wider world, many of whom who are frustrated about the current culture war dynamics causing an inability for people to unite on their common ground and move forward together. Angelle had made it clear that her vision of real freedom would include the freedom of each of these groups to pursue their dreams, and an end to the bitter divisiveness that currently dominated society. 'We have more in common than we think' has indeed become one of Angelle's main rallying cries nowadays.

Right now, another area where common ground appears to be emerging from previously opposing camps is gaining widespread attention. The recent declaration by the conservative British Prime Minister that he supports same-sex marriage as part of his conservative values has caused a rethink of the conservative attitude towards this issue worldwide. Previously, conservatives have been

mostly united in their opposition to same-sex marriage, seeing it as an attempt by radicals to redefine a historical institution. But perhaps it has been just about same-sex couples wanting to participate in the great tradition of marriage all along. If this is the case then, why should conservatives, who value lifelong commitment and stable relationships, refuse to support them? Surely, radicals have used this cause in an attempt to discredit conservative governments, churches and even marriage itself alike, but perhaps they were always just using a cause that had never belonged to them at all? Recently there has been some further evidence of this idea. Now that the conservative case for marriage equality is being heard loud and clear, some radicals have come out to reason that, perhaps, the only case ever for this idea has been the conservative case, saying that marriage equality only serves to assimilate the queer community into the conservative institution of marriage. Angelle did her research on where people actually stood, and found that

radicals were historically uncomfortable with the idea anyway, and they felt this way all the way up to the recent turn of the century and perhaps beyond that. Meanwhile, most younger generation conservatives actually support marriage equality nowadays, and some are indeed very passionate about it.

Realising all this, Angelle has decided that she will organise her own March for Marriage Equality, under the banner of advancing the issue on common ground, and of course the whole idea of the Princess's Spirit. While there have been quite a few such marches previously, they have been organised by radical left wing groups, and more conservative sections of society have felt uncomfortable attending due to the divisive, war-like attitude of those involved. Angelle thought that her march would not only provide a new way forward on the issue, but finally provide an opportunity for those who have long wanted to support the

cause but felt uncomfortable about the radicals' marches to show their support.

"Remember, no divisive slogans, and no verbal attacks on particular people or political parties. We are an inclusive group of people trying to achieve a common goal here, and the purpose of this parade is to show our fellow citizens that our cause has strong support from a diverse range of people," Angelle told the several hundred participants, before the march began.

Just as the radicals often do, today they marched through the city towards Central Park on a Saturday morning, carrying banners with all sorts of colours and descriptions, telling people which section of society they were representing. Angelle was right: her march had

been able to attract a much more diverse range of people than the radicals' marches. There were various ethnic groups and religious groups represented, and there were even groups representing people from the outer suburbs, all groups of people not traditionally thought to support marriage equality in significant numbers. The atmosphere was also very different: there was no feeling of an angry attitude at the rest of society here. In this march, we are the people, representatives of everyday citizens who simply want to improve the way things are.

At the conclusion of the march, a small group of young adults carrying the blue and white banner of the Grand Heritage Party approached Angelle. She was pleasantly surprised, as she thought that whole party saw her as the enemy.

"Thank you for doing this. You know, we have long supported gay marriage too. But when the issue was dominated by the far-left, it was unacceptable for us to come on board publicly. Hopefully after today, things will be different," a young man said.

"You know, there's indeed a lot of common ground we can work upon, no matter what our political and cultural affiliations are. Let's hope one day all this bitter divisiveness, all this progressive vs conservative stuff, will come to an end," Angelle replied.

Angelle stepped up to the podium in the middle of Central Park for a final speech to conclude the parade.

"Thank you all for coming along to show your support today. Together, we have shown the people of Pacificland that support for marriage

equality is widespread and diverse. We have shown that it is an issue people from many different backgrounds and walks of life want to see addressed. And while we want change, most of us want it in a positive way, making it something that brings us together rather than something that divides us.

To sum up why we are here today, I have written a song. I have deliberately tried to make it positive, unlike your typical protest song, because negativity will get us nowhere. Remember, keep up the positive attitude. This song is for all of you.

SONG"

As Angelle stepped off the podium, she saw a familiar face walking towards her. She recognised that it was Jenny.

"Angelle, thanks for doing this. And by the way, can I rejoin your group?" Jenny said.

"You're always welcome to do so, if that's what you want," Angelle said.

"You know, in my heart I have never actually left you. It was just that my conservative parents saw you as a bad influence and banned me from being part of your group. Even after I became an adult, I was scared that they would be unhappy if I rejoined. But recently I have been able to convince them that you really care about people and bringing people together, and that you don't support a radical agenda for society like they may have suspected. Please forgive me for not being strong about believing in you all these years," Jenny said.

"It's alright. Family is more important than politics. I would have chosen family over politics too, if I were so unlucky to be forced to choose," Angelle said. "Come with me, the

others are waiting in that tent over there. They will be very happy to see your return."

Chapter 31

The Great Freedom Debate

Two months out from the 2012 Heirs Council elections, things are finally looking better for Team Angelle. Polling now has them running a sort of close third behind Grand Heritage Party and Change The Era, meaning that they are one of the 'big three to watch', and that they are invited to the major parties' debate. Angelle's recent popularity among previously disaffected young people and her leadership on the marriage equality issue have given them a huge boost. Meanwhile, the GHP has started to suffer for the same reasons. Increasing numbers of young people now feel that they are out of touch, and the internal division over marriage equality is starting to hurt, especially as King Jashor is still trying his best to hold the party to his own views.

After the drama of Occupy and the increased awareness about youth issues, there has also been a new drive to get young people involved in society and politics, and to allow more young voices to be heard. As part of this new attitude, there has been a new importance attached to the Heirs Council elections. In fact, this year's major parties' debate will be held in the State Auditorium in the middle of the city, rather than in Royal College, and it will also be televised. This means the stakes have never been higher, but the opportunities have never been better either.

Angelle couldn't believe it was really happening. Here they were, at the backstage area of the State Auditorium, with the debate to commence any time now.

"You ready and fired up?" Natalie asked.

"I hope so. To tell the truth, I'm a bit nervous," Angelle said.

"It's normal to feel this way. But I know you'll do well," Natalie said.

"Remember, we're all behind you," Katie said.

"Candidates, please proceed onto the stage and take your seats," announced a voice coming from the speakers.

Angelle walked out to the stage, trying to look as confident as she could. As the whole of the auditorium came into view, her first thought was how big this place was. It looked even bigger than it appeared on TV.

"Good evening ladies and gentlemen. Welcome to the Great Debate for the 2012 Heirs Council elections. Tonight, we have invited the leaders of the three biggest forces in this election according to the latest polls. We bring you Jenelle Lacey of the Grand Heritage Party, Angelle Easterner of the Princess's Spirit Party, and Danielle Krad of Change The Era," the moderator announced. "Unlike previous years, we have decided to make the debate fairer and more relevant to the general public by letting our panel of journalists ask the questions. The candidates will answer the questions in a pre-determined order. So, without further delay, the first question comes from Lawrence Met of the Pacificland Liberty Daily."

"Here at the Liberty Daily we take the liberty concept very seriously. All three of you have

had plenty of things to say about liberty. So can you please give us a clear summary of your views on the idea of liberty, and how it is better than what the others have to offer?" Mr Met asked.

"We, the Grand Heritage Party, are the only true party of liberty," Jenelle began. "I don't mean to disrespect my colleagues here tonight, but how can they claim to be for liberty if they don't guarantee support for cutting the size of our government down to as small as possible? Items in their platforms call for more government intrusion, indeed. We have all sorts of proposals like anti-discrimination laws, more tax-payer money to fund health and education which will result in higher taxes, tariffs to limit free trade, and the like. There's even a proposal by CTE to severely limit free speech at all public colleges, including Royal College. I can't see how this is anything but authoritarianism."

It was Angelle's turn to speak.

"The Princess's Spirit Party will support true, practical liberty for all," Angelle began, feeling slightly more confident now, and quite passionate indeed. "The events of recent years have taught us that many people are indeed struggling out there, and without a bit of financial help they will never practically experience freedom. There are many young people out there who cannot even get a decent education and the life opportunities that come with it, without going into huge debt. Similarly, when one cannot even pay for their own health care, they effectively become a slave to anyone who can offer the money. Where's the freedom in all this? You may say people have the freedom to make themselves richer. By what? It's not like they're not willing to work. It's just that, in this economy, jobs are not always

available. You may then suggest they start their own business. With whose money do they do that?

Similarly, strong anti-discrimination laws are long overdue in Pacificland. When minorities have to face the tyranny of the majority, can you call this freedom? Many LGBT people out there have to hide in the closet just to survive, and since we the Princess's Spirit people care about everyone's freedom, we cannot just let this happen and do nothing about it. The fact that the GHP platform still opposes the freedom to marry for same-sex couples is further proof that they don't care about the freedom of certain people at all.

On the other hand, these issues aside, we are clearly for liberty. A real Princess always respects everyone else's agency and aspirations in life, and will never enslave anyone's

conscience for any grand agenda, because a real Princess actually cares about people. We support the idea of free speech, and will form an alliance with other parties to oppose CTE's proposals for bans on so-called 'cultural appropriation' and so-called 'safe speech guarantees' at colleges. We don't believe in 'safe speech guarantees' because the concept is fundamentally detrimental to human progress. Think about it. If ensuring that people feel 'safe' about your speech was ever a legitimate reason not to speak up, then nobody would ever have been able to speak up about women's rights, civil rights or gay rights in the first place, in the climate we had several decades ago. Furthermore, CTE's proposals to ban 'cultural appropriation' will lead to huge erosions in artistic freedom and the freedom of expression. Artists will live in fear that their work will be banned, especially as there is no clear line where cultural appropriation ends and intercultural inspiration begins. These examples

all show that we are indeed very strong about the concept of liberty."

Angelle hoped that she had done enough to be convincing. In her heart, she knew that her case was the strongest theoretically, but in politics, perception is everything.

"In their quest to fool us into accepting more of the status quo, both our opponents here have deliberately missed one important thing: all this talk about liberty ignores social dynamics where people are being oppressed. True liberation is where people are no longer oppressed, and only a program totally focussed on this fact like our one will bring about this," Danielle said.

"You may think the GHP and the Princess Party have two very different views about liberty and society. But the truth is that they are two sides of the same coin, the so-called good cop and the bad cop. The Princess Party offers a

sympathetic ear and a slightly lesser evil set of policies, but they are still about maintaining the status quo in every way. In any case, men will still oppress women, straight will still oppress queer, and so on. In fact, if I were given the choice of only these two parties, I would rather have the GHP, because their frankness about maintaining privilege and oppression would at least make people rise up on their own."

Angelle was frustrated, and had to stop herself from yelling out 'please explain how this will be the case using clear examples' throughout Danielle's speech. However, she had expected nothing less. CTE has been about using complex and grand sounding but not actually sound theories to justify their positions, and they often mischaracterise their opponents' positions too. Encouraging a victim mentality among its followers is another classic CTE tactic. And of course they would prefer the GHP, a more

straightforward opponent, much easier to fight against.

Chapter 32

A Divide in the Pro-Equality Camp

"Candidates, thank you for your answers. Now, let's move onto the next question, to be asked by Jeremy Joh from the Pacificland National Express," the moderator said.

"The issue of same-sex marriage is a hot topic right now, especially among young people. Can you please outline how your party perceives this issue, and what your actual approach to it is?" Mr Joh asked.

Angelle was to speak first in this round.

"I have long been a strong supporter of marriage equality, and so has my party. In fact, we have paid heavy political prices for our

stance in the past decade. For us, equality before the law and the freedom to access marriage as you and your cultural or religious community sees fit is non-negotiable. A government policy against same-sex marriage is both a denial of rights against gay couples, and a favouring of one religious doctrine over another.

To achieve equality and do so satisfyingly for our society, we need to bring people together. This is an issue where a diverse range of people, from different backgrounds, of different cultures and religious beliefs, and in living in very different social settings, all want to see progress on. The challenge is to unite everyone around a common goal, and still make sure there is enough space for every voice here.

In my recent work to advance marriage equality, I have had many people come up to

me and tell me that they have, for some time, been supportive of marriage equality, but have been scared away by the common view that this is a somehow radical change to society. A more inclusive and less divisive approach has meant that more and more people have seen the truth, that this is a simple change that will affect only 2% or so of the population, and nobody else, while making our society a much fairer and freer place for all."

Angelle was happy that she was given the opportunity to say all this. It was important to spread this message and put it on record, as many times as possible, she believed.

"Of course CTE supports marriage equality. In fact, we have had nine rallies on this issue, and the Princess Party has only held one. Angelle is also right that our approach is very different. In

fact, I am concerned about the Princess Party's approach to this issue.

Marriage equality is great and necessary, as part of making things equal and ending oppression. But if we make it about assimilation and conformity, then I'd rather not have it. If achieving marriage equality means that we must bend to the wishes of religious groups and the conservative ideals of family values, then I'd rather wait until society is ready for change on our terms instead. We therefore do not welcome the so-called conservative case for marriage equality.

Angelle is both right and wrong when she says that marriage equality is a minor change. If we achieve it on her terms, it will be a minor change, a waste of a revolutionary moment. But if we achieve it as a revolution to marriage and society and a final rejection of conservative

values, then it would be a real game changer. Unlike the Princess Party, we would rather wait for real change than take breadcrumbs from the conservative table," Danielle said.

"Danielle, thank you for being honest about the intent of the gay marriage movement all along. It was never about equality or freedom. It is about destroying marriage and our sacred family values, about using a seemingly minor change to radically transform society. And in this transformed society controlled by the likes of CTE, there will definitely be less freedom. Therefore, gay marriage, far from being a reform for freedom, is actually a trojan horse against freedom," Jenelle said.

Angelle couldn't hold herself back any longer. She leapt forward and began speaking passionately.

"Both the radical hijack of marriage equality and the conservative objections based on the radical hijack have more in common than they would like to admit: both camps only care about having ideological arguments, and they don't really care about people's lives. We are talking about real couples who have been waiting for, in some cases, decades to get married. It's not about ideology, it's about freedom for all, it's about compassion, it's about humanity. I'm sick and tired of those treating this issue like a political football!"

Chapter 33

Visions for Our Future

"I would like to remind candidates that speaking out of order is not allowed. I will not give any more warnings. Our third and final question comes from Mariam Lind of the Pacificland Federal Herald," the moderator said.

"Young adults are the future guardians of our society. As such, I would like to hear what vision you, as young adults yourselves and as representatives of many other young people in our society, have for our future," Ms Lind said.

"Our vision is one of true liberation and justice for all. There are all kinds of oppression around us that people, including the currently oppressed, do not even know about yet. This is because they have not tasted true liberation

and justice. But to achieve this true liberation and justice, we first need to radically transform society. This is what Change The Era stands for," Danielle said.

"So-called progressives, including both of my opponents here tonight, like to claim that people are oppressed and want different things, when it's actually not the case. Even Danielle here has admitted that people 'do not know' about the kind of oppression CTE says they are experiencing. Well, guess what? If people don't feel like they are being oppressed, then maybe they just aren't. People want to live in societies guided by traditional values, and have their traditional liberties protected from intrusion by radicals. If this is what you want, then the Grand Heritage Party is your best friend. This is why we have performed so well in past elections," Jenelle said.

Angelle was lucky to be able to have the final word of the whole debate. She knew this could be make or break.

"Unlike both other candidates here tonight, I do not have a one-size-fits-all future intended for everyone. People should be free to pursue their lives according to their values, their consciences and their aspirations, and ideas should be allowed to compete in an equal playing field, so the best will eventually win out. It is inappropriate to centrally enforce radical change on society telling people this is what they surely want, just as it is inappropriate to centrally enforce one conservative vision. Even among people with the same kind of values and outlook in life, there are likely to be issues where they differ, like the current division over marriage equality among conservatives. We propose that people be free from having to compromise their consciences so that we can have a conformist society. Instead, we propose

that everyone should be able to show the world why their values are great, and only a truly free market of ideas will offer this chance.

Therefore, I am proud to say that the Princess's Spirit Party has no ideological outlook, other than to help everyone, including both the establishment and the radicals, and both the privileged and the disadvantaged, the chance to live out their aspirations," she said.

Chapter 34

It's Make Or Break

Angelle was feeling nervous as she and her team were on their way to Liberty Hall, the venue they had booked for election night. This time, it's either make or break. She could score enough nominations to become Royalty, or she could miss out, which may mean she will never see a better chance again.

"Don't worry, we'll do well. The polls have us in the top three," Natalie said.

"But the last polls were taken a week ago, before my final speech and the surrounding controversy," Angelle said.

"That was a masterpiece. It was a game changer. You should be proud of it," Katie said.

"I guess it represents what I want to say. I just don't know how it will be received out there," Angelle said.

Angelle was referring to a final speech she had given just two days ago, in which she said that she had never been enemies with 'conservatives', that she welcomed everyone into her tent and hoped that everyone can work together. In essence, this had always been true. She had never sought to be enemies with the pro-Jashor forces, it was just that they marked her out as an enemy. She had never sought to oppose the conservatives' agenda for the sake of opposing, she was just standing up for minorities who would suffer under that agenda, and standing up for liberty at a time when conservatives were hellbent on taking it away. And if now the 'conservatives' are changing, so should her attitude to them. Her vision wasn't a world permanently divided for the sake of division. This wouldn't be the way of a truly

worthy Princess. The Princess's Spirit is about working for the welfare of all, after all.

Of course, this has brought accusations of 'selling out' and 'pandering to the enemy'. CTE is, as expected, leading the witch hunt. Not only because Angelle is one of their major opponents in this election, but also because they can paint themselves as the only 'true progressives'. Right now, not only in Pacificland but also in many other parts of the world, many young people out there are sick and tired of the past three decades of conservatism, and would embrace anything that looked like 'truly progressive'. Angelle is worried that being seen as 'selling out' would play out badly among this growing population, whether this perception actually represents reality or not.

Still, she has no regrets about taking the stances she has taken. Just as she had believed almost a

decade ago, the most important thing for a Real Princess to do was to be true to her values and beliefs.

As they walked into the entrance of Liberty Hall, there were already a lot of reporters waiting outside. Team Angelle had become much more important than in previous elections. This was getting real.

"How do you feel about your chances tonight?" one reporter asked.

"I'm feeling confident. I'm cautiously optimistic," Angelle replied, trying her best to look happy.

As Angelle entered the main hall, she could see that it was already well decorated in yellow and purple. The refreshment bar was also ready, with plenty of food for everyone.

"It's already been set up?" Angelle asked, quite surprised.

"Of course, we're big players now, so things like these are automatically done for us. Besides, this is Liberty Hall, not some shabby venue in the suburbs. We tell them how to do it, and they do it," Katie said.

Angelle felt slightly more relieved as the results came in. The Princess's Spirit Party had won 40 seats, which would theoretically be more than enough to make her Royalty. But nowadays,

with the 'inflation' in the number of nominations actually needed due to intense competition, this number would be borderline. Still, there are likely to be independents and minor parties she could negotiate with. She believes she is still likely to get what she wants in the end.

"So we're the second largest party in there now," Natalie said, quite pleased.

"I can't believe they are stupid enough to have trusted the CTE, to give them the most seats," Jordan said.

"Well, some people just hear 'progressive' and sign up, and don't really study the policies and their implications, unfortunately. In another four years' time, hopefully they will have learnt their lesson, seeing how CTE actually operates in the Council," Katie said.

"But still, I have to say we've done well. And no, we'll never sacrifice our principles to compete with CTE, or even worse, cut deals with enemies of liberty like CTE. We didn't do it in 2006 and we won't begin to do that now," Natalie said.

"You're right. Their version of 'progress', which is to implement it over the liberties, the wishes, and even the actual livelihoods of people, is incompatible with our much more inclusive and pro-liberty vision of progress. And since we know we're right and they're wrong, why would we give in to them?" Katie said.

"So it's time to celebrate, right?" Jordan said.

"I don't know. I'm worried about how divided the whole place is now, with extremists of all types gaining a foothold in there. Besides, being second to CTE would be a weird position to play in," Angelle said.

"So you're worried?" Mandel asked, almost surprised.

"Don't worry, CTE has no mainstream appeal, and it's not like they have an absolute majority or can work with anyone else in there, so they are still as fringe as ever before despite their 50 seats. As for the division and rise of extremists, that's the case everywhere around the world in the 2010s, unfortunately," Jordan said.

"I actually think this situation will suit us well. Our talent, or should I say your talent, is to bring people together, and that should be our new theme. It will be an exciting and fruitful four years, with lots to be done," Natalie said.

"Meanwhile, I believe the big story in this election is the collapse of the GHP. Only 12 seats! Jenelle will certainly resign as leader now," Katie said.

This thought made Angelle more optimistic. Not because she hated the GHP or Jenelle. Frankly, she has bigger things to worry about nowadays. But the splintering of the GHP vote has meant that there are now many more minor parties and independents, that she can potentially court. In a reflection of the international picture, the conservatives are now fundamentally divided by things like marriage equality, paying the price for their long-standing authoritarian tendencies some would say, and they surely can't come together again as a functioning bloc any time soon. This, in turn, means that some moderate conservatives may come into the broader liberal tent, and maybe even become new allies.

Thinking about it, Angelle was confident that her strategy to bring people together would work well in an environment like this. She decided that this should be her 'theme' for now

on. Tonight's speech to the media will set the tone of things to come.

"Ladies and Gentlemen,

Thank you for being here with the Princess's Spirit Party tonight, as we celebrate our gains in this election. I would firstly like to thank my team, who have been working day and night to make this possible. I also thank you for your loyalty to me, personally. I also wish to thank my family, especially my mom, without whose support I wouldn't be here today.

We are well aware that our supporters come from all walks of life, including struggling young people, everyday families who just want to get

on with their lives, the increasing number of people who are sick and tired of the 'culture wars', and entrepreneurs and others with new ideas who want a chance to make their vision come true, just to name a few groups. Some people have questioned how a party supported by such a diverse range of people can work effectively for all of them. For us, it all boils down to two things: our vision of one society that works for everyone, and our belief in liberty.

Like a Real Princess, we strive to work for the welfare of a wide range of people. We simply don't leave people behind because we somehow judge that we don't like them. We also believe that people are entitled to be different, and society should be inclusive of all. Furthermore, we believe that there can be unity in diversity, and peace in difference, through a common commitment to liberty. A vision of liberty and equal opportunity will benefit

everyone in society, whether you are a struggling single mother or an entrepreneur, whether you are a social visionary or just someone who wants society to leave your family alone. It is the core of our vision.

We are grateful that a record number of voters have decided to support us. To those who have come aboard our ship in this election, we promise that we won't let you down.

Going forward, I have proposed and my team has agreed that the name of this party will be changed to Unity in Liberty, to reflect our new core mission. The Princess's Spirit is, after all, about bringing people together and working for a better deal in life for everyone. It is about coming together to ensure the best chance for all of us to achieve each of our dreams. It also is about ending the bigotry and discriminatory limitations in society, while making sure no new

taboos are established and no new outcasts are created in the process. A vision of unity in the pursuit of practical, effective liberty is the best way to achieve all of the aforementioned outcomes. Therefore, it is the truest political manifestation of the Princess's Spirit.

Thank you."

Chapter 35

Negotiations

"So you're OK with this plan?" Angelle asked.

"Yes, of course. We're all in this together," Natalie said.

"You have always been my top advisor. I really need your help now. Will our team accept the plan, or will they think I'm acting out of my self interest? I can't afford any suspicion or division in our ranks right now, with CTE ready to exploit any sign of those things any minute," Angelle said.

"Honestly, I can't be 100% sure, but I think it'll work. I mean, in this complex game we all need to use strategy, and even if there are critics in the short term, in the longer term we will be vindicated, and that will win us respect on a totally different level. We can only prove CTE wrong once and for all that way," Natalie said.

"And honestly, do you think my asking for that something in return will make it look bad?"

Angelle asked.

"Not really. Not asking anything in return will look much more suspicious in fact, to both the GHP and our own supporters. On the GHP side, they may start suspecting Jenelle of selling out, threatening her already weak leadership, undermining the whole deal. In our camp, the fact that we get something too makes everyone more comfortable with the deal. And that something is not small, remember. I'm sure everyone will understand that the status and clout of the first-elected Cultural Royal will advance our cause a long way, and will be made all the more powerful combined with our control over Jenelle," Natalie said.

This eased Angelle's mind a bit. Logically, this was both the best deal for herself and the best deal for her party and cause. Letting Jenelle be

the new Chairwoman but using Team Angelle's votes to control her from behind would be a much better strategy than going for the Council Chair herself and risking being the common enemy in this fractured Council. Asking something in return only makes the deal less suspicious. But the fact that all this would also be the route to provide Angelle with her lifelong ambition, the status of Cultural Royalty, still made her fear any accusations of putting self interest before the common good.

Nobody could know they were here, so it had to be quick. Of course, nobody was likely to know, since this was the dorm room of a mutually trusted friend, on the quiet top floor, no less. But still, they knew they had to be careful.

"So all my people will nominate you to be Cultural Royalty by the deadline at lunchtime today, and you'll receive your email notice early this afternoon. In return, this evening your people will vote as a bloc for me to be the new Chair," Jenelle said.

"It's also all the other minor parties and independents that we've been able to include in our deal too, so it's not just my people and your people technically. But yes, that's the deal we discussed last week. You have my word for it," Angelle said.

"Your word? How can I trust that? How can I know you won't just vote yourself into the Chair instead once you've secure the nominations, so you'll have both things?" Jenelle said.

"You know, in politics, reputation is everything. For a Cultural Royal, reputation is even more important. If I break my promise, you can simply go out and tell the media about it, and it will

sink my career for good. Why would I do that?" Angelle said.

Jenelle thought for a while.

"You know, maybe we should put the past behind us. Honestly, I don't hate you anymore. You are a worthy adversary, but that doesn't mean we can't form alliances sometimes too. In politics, there are no permanent friends or enemies, after all," she said.

"You know, I've never actually hated you. I'm glad you're now mature enough to understand that politics is about much more important things than personal likes or dislikes," Angelle said.

"I guess we're not teenagers anymore," Jenelle said.

"Agreed. But for the sake of getting this thing done smoothly, I need you and your people to keep up the usual show running for the rest of today at least," Angelle said.

"We'll keep the show running, of course. And it won't just be for today. I sense that we have to pretend to be arch enemies for a little longer, just to keep self interests or extremism from being too excited and spoil everything," Jenelle said.

"Agreed," Angelle said.

Angelle and her team of 40 walked triumphantly to the pick-up point after classes. In her hand was the new banner for the party, still purple and yellow, but bearing their new name, 'Unity in Liberty'. The notice of receiving 84 nominations for Cultural Royalty that she had received just two hours ago sure did help her confidence, even though it was something she had expected anyway.

"Here comes the late MHC again. It looks like they have ditched the stupid Princess brand, but guess what, your new name sucks just as much!" Jenelle shouted, perhaps a bit too deliberately loudly, as Team Angelle approached.

"Be careful. If I were you, I would try to get along with the incoming Chairwoman. We've got at least 60 votes locked in so Angelle will definitely win this time," Natalie yelled back.

"Who knows? Maybe someone else out there has more," Jenelle said.

"It looks like all the conservative forces are still with Jenelle, and Jenelle still hates Angelle. I think we can win," Angelle overheard a CTE member whispered to another.

The ride to Heirs Council surely looks very familiar to Angelle now. The ride does feel a little different today though, and not just because she was on a big bus of more than 40 seats. Something important, and quite exciting, was about to happen, and you could feel the tension in the air.

Angelle led her team off the bus, to be greeted by a smartly dressed young man.

"I guess you're going to lead us to our new seats? By the way, I'm Angelle, leader of Unity in Liberty, and this is Natalie, my deputy, and the rest of the team," Angelle said.

"And a team of 40 too, I'm so honoured to be your host tonight! By the way, my name is Mack," he said.

"So Mack, where has the King assigned us to sit this year?" Natalie asked, as they walked.

"He's just changed it to alphabetical order this time," Mack said.

Angelle was relieved to hear. One less thing to care about.

"By the way, Angelle's running for Chairwoman, right?" Mack asked.

"I don't know, we haven't discussed it. I guess it's her choice," Natalie said.

"You're running, right, Angelle?" Mack asked Angelle.

"I'm sorry, I'm not supposed to discuss this matter in this context. You know, I'll be disqualified if I did," Angelle said.

"So you're running," Mack said.

"I never said that," Angelle said.

Chapter 36

The Maiden Speech

"Good evening ladies and gentlemen. Welcome back to Heirs Council! My name is Jack, I'm the chief secretary of the Heirs Council Clerks, but I'm not your new Chairman, don't worry. As you know, as former Chairman Peter Waters lost his seat in last year's elections, we don't have a Chair right now, so our first order of business is to elect a Chair. The inauguration of new Royals will take place afterwards, because a Chair's discretion is required for that task, even though I need to remind everybody that the discretion is ceremonial only and the five people with the most nominations will as a rule be crowned," Jack announced.

"Tonight, we have two candidates for Chairperson, Jenelle Lacey representing the Grand Heritage Party, and Nadia Leah

representing Change The Era. Without delay, I invite Miss Lacey to take the stage to make her case for election."

There was gasps around the room, followed by loud chatter. They were surprised that Angelle was not running. Previously, everyone had thought it would be between Angelle and Nadia. This expectation also meant nobody else thought they had a chance, so nobody else nominated. Everything was going to plan, Angelle thought.

Angelle turned to address her team.

"So, as leader, who do you advise we vote for?" Natalie asked, already knowing the answer.

"Why didn't you run yourself?" Katie asked, also knowing the answer, but doing it for the benefit of the newer team members who don't know the arrangement.

"As you can see, this is a fractured and divided Council, and it's risky to put yourself out there, as you can become the common enemy. It would be much better to have one of these two clowns take the poisoned chalice. As for which clown should have it, I vote Jenelle. Because right now, CTE is our main enemy, and we don't want to give them any edge in any sense. Besides, it will set up Jenelle and the GHP as CTE's main enemies for this term, meaning they have less time to attack us," Angelle said. "Any other opinions?"

The team agreed in unison.

"The results are in," Jack announced, after reappearing on stage. "There were a lot of blank ballots, but as per the rules, the candidate with

the most valid ballots win. Candidate Leah, 39%, Candidate Lacey, 61%. I hereby announce that Jenelle Lacey is the new Chairwoman of Heirs Council. And with that, my duty today is done. I should hand over to your new Chairwoman,"

There were both cheers and boos, but mostly boos. Angelle instructed her team to join in the booing, as part of the 'show'.

"Good evening ladies and gentlemen, I am honoured to be your new Chairwoman," Jenelle said, as the booing continued.

"My first order of business is to inaugurate new Cultural Royals, the Class of 2013. As per usual practice, I have used my ceremonial discretion to select five new Cultural Royals from the many nominations. Your new Royals are, in order of selection, Princess Angelle of House

Easterner, Prince Luke of House Blueboard, Princess Rosie of House London, Prince Martin of House Roy, and Princess Lisa of House Lee. I welcome them on stage for the crowning."

As Angelle walked towards the stage, she almost cried. She had worked so hard for this, for the past ten years. But she knew that this was just the beginning. A Cultural Princess has to act like a real Princess and serve the community accordingly. Angelle knew that her real work had only just begun.

"As per our tradition, the new Cultural Royals will each give a Maiden Speech as part of their induction, to let them tell the world what they intend to use their new status for. The speeches are to be scheduled over the next few meetings,

to be held where time permits, and in order of selection. As we still have plenty of time remaining today, I think we should begin the speeches. So let me invite Princess Angelle to the stage again!" Jenelle announced.

Angelle walked up the stage again, and shook Jenelle's hand before taking the microphone. They smiled briefly at each other, in a 'mission accomplished' kind of way.

"Good evening ladies and gentlemen,

I am honoured to be selected as a Cultural Princess. You can have trust in me that I will use my position to serve our community.

I am a big fan of the idea of unity in liberty. In fact, this is the new name of our party, as

approved by the whole team, as it is the clearest statement of our mission. I will work for a society where we bring people together to solve our collective problems, and uphold the liberty of each individual to pursue their vision otherwise. In fact, I also believe that as a society we should provide adequate opportunities for everyone to become their best in life, this is one important aspect of liberty that is often forgotten. Through all this, we can achieve unity in liberty.

We need unity because, to achieve progress, it is vital that we bring people together. Right now, in both the UK and New Zealand, conservatives, moderates and progressives alike are working to progress the issue of marriage equality, which looks set to be achieved later this year in both countries. On the other hand, a picture of divisiveness, a state of culture war between so-called progressives and so-called conservatives, have hampered moves towards

the same reform in countries like the US and Australia. It's clear which model Pacificland should follow. As responsible adults, we should recognise that we are not kids anymore, and to serve the best interests of our society and indeed our world, we need to stop the bickering and pointless rivalry and come together in rational discussion. When you've experienced enough of this world and its political shifts, you realise that there are in fact very few people in this world that you can never work with, that you can be sure will never be helpful to you one day.

We also need liberty because we are all equal, in a moral sense. We are all morally imperfect, and we can all make important moral contributions on the other hand. To limit the moral agency of another human being is potentially to force another into immoral behaviour, and therefore something we should refrain from. I believe that in a free market of

ideas, the best will ultimately win out. Moreover, the only sustainable unity that we can have is in liberty. If we allow some people's beliefs to override others', there will never be peace for long. On the other hand, in a system that we agree to sometimes disagree and let everyone have space to follow their own moral compasses, we can nevertheless unite to both solve our collective issues, and also to protect liberty itself.

In today's rapidly changing world, there is often too much cultural and ideological tribalism, where people of a certain group just blindly follow their group, and fight against other groups in cultural and identity type battles. This phenomenon is most clearly seen in identity politics, but is not even limited to that area. With unity in liberty, I offer something different: where a strong culture of liberty for all means an end to such tribalism, and in turn allow us to come together as one society defending liberty

and equal opportunity strongly, negating the need for identity politics.

Once again, I am humbled by the huge responsibility now placed upon me, and I will work hard to bring my values to fruition, making Pacificland and the world a better place in the process."

There were both cheers and booing, and Angelle could make out that the loudest boos have come from the CTE area. No surprises there, she thought.

Chapter 37

Angelle's First Endorsement

"I wish to announce that I will soon publicly endorse the Ramstown bid for the throne, by the way," Angelle told her team.

"But do we really need to take sides? And should we actually do so, strategically?" Mandel asked.

"First of all, it's me who is taking sides, not all of you. Unity in Liberty remains neutral in this year's election, but I myself, as a Cultural Princess, have decided to give my endorsement to Senator Ramstown's bid to become our new King," Angelle explained.

"But why would you have to take sides, anyway? Isn't it risky?" Jordan asked.

"Every decision in politics comes with certain risks, and trying to stay away from risk all the time won't work either. As a new Cultural

Princess, being the first Cultural Royal to give an endorsement in a national election will certainly help my profile. It will also be a good chance to highlight the many things that I agree with Ramstown on, like the need to provide our youth with better educational opportunities, the need to increase welfare payments to liveable levels, and the need to legislate for marriage equality as a priority," Angelle said.

"But would you be forced to then agree with him on everything else?" Jordan asked.

"I don't think so. An endorsement basically just means he is better than the other guy and can be given on a number of limited grounds, it doesn't have to mean total agreement. Past Cultural Royalty endorsements have often left space for substantial disagreements in policy," Angelle said.

As Angelle walked into the Pacificland Press Club Building to make her speech, reporters were already waiting outside with their cameras and microphones. Angelle suddenly realised how much more important she had now become. In fact, all this attention was beginning to make her feel uneasy.

"Are you giving your endorsement to a candidate today?" one reporter asked.

"Well, you'll find out soon," Angelle said.

"Is it true that you hate King Jashor?" another reporter asked.

"I don't hate anybody. But I've really got to go now, as I'm already running late," Angelle said, as she made a dash to the right to break free from the reporters.

As soon as she got inside, Angelle was received by a staff member, who took her up to level five, where press conferences are usually held.

"Are you nervous?" he asked.

"Maybe a bit," Angelle said.

"You know it's normal to feel a bit nervous. It's your first press conference, after all," he said.

It almost felt surreal, as Angelle stepped into the press conference area. She had seen this place on television so many times throughout her life, and now she was there. The royal blue curtain, the wooden stage, the rows of chairs where the reporters sat, everything looked so familiar. Yet it all looked a bit different, now that she was seeing the whole place in real life, from a different perspective than the one shown on TV. The whole room was definitely smaller than she had always imagined it to be.

Angelle took her place at the center of the stage.

"Good evening ladies and gentlemen,

Today I am announcing my endorsement of Senator John Ramstown in his bid to run for election as our new King.

In three months' time our nation will make a very important decision. To stick with King Jashor, or to elect a new King, and if we are to elect a new King, who to get behind.

Firstly, I must say that I have no ill feelings towards King Jashor. However, I do not agree with many of his policies. Opinion polls have also shown that his policies, which have stayed mostly the same since the beginning of his reign

a decade ago, have lost majority support in recent years. In the past decade, much of the world including many Pacificlanders have become much more forward looking, regarding a wide range of issues, including the need to provide better opportunities for our young and our disadvantaged, the need to invest in computer and internet related infrastructure to meet new demands, and the need to seriously address the rights of long suffering minorities, such as in marriage equality. The King is a conservative man, and he apparently does not want to change his mind. I believe his refusal to let Pacificland evolve, even in the face of rapidly changing global situations and attitudes, means that Pacificland will become a backwater where its citizens no longer enjoy the freedom and opportunities people can soon take for granted in other developed nations. It is for this reason, and this reason alone, that I believe we need a change in leadership.

As to which candidate we should get behind, I think we should all get behind the candidate who will address the aforementioned issues and who has the best chance of winning the race. While many candidates are serious about progressing a variety of issues, it looks like this year it will mainly come down to a two-horse race between King Jashor and Senator Ramstown. It is therefore my belief that the best path forward to get the progress many of us want will be to get behind Senator Ramstown together.

I have time for two questions."

There was a brief pause.

"Princess Angelle, I know you have been a long term supporter of gay marriage. Is your decision to endorse the defeat of King Jashor to do with

this issue mostly? And if so, don't you think you're paying too much attention to a side dish?" a reporter asked.

"I never endorse anybody based on one policy alone. My endorsement is for the overall benefit of our nation and its future. However, I also don't agree with the characterisation of marriage equality as a side dish, and many people of my generation both in this country and overseas would agree with me. Equal civil rights before the law is something we should uphold keenly, and the attitude of seeing it as a side dish is frankly offensive. Unfortunately, you are definitely not alone in thinking this way. Plenty of commentators both here and overseas have described marriage equality as nothing more than a distraction from so-called more important issues, and it's time those of us who disagree spoke up," Angelle said.

"So you're telling people to get behind Senator Ramstown, just because he's the front-runner at the moment? Shouldn't it be a fair race, let the best guy win?" another reporter asked.

"I am doing what I think is best for the nation, others can agree with me or decide otherwise. But here's my plea to all of you: everybody out there who wants change, please come together and find a way forward together, and don't let our energy splinter in a dozen different directions," Angelle said.

It has been just two days since Angelle's endorsement of Ramstown, but right now there's trouble for both of them. A viral video, likely made by people associated with CTE, is spreading on the internet. It alleges that Angelle

only became a Cultural Princess because she agreed to be a lap dog of Jenelle's, and by extension, because Angelle endorses Ramstown and Jenelle endorses Jashor, they are effectively one and the same.

"I have to right this wrong, if only to be fair to Ramstown, whatever the price to myself," Angelle declared.

"But what exactly are you going to do? There are so many things you can do to make it worse for both of you," Natalie said.

Angelle thought for a while.

"You do have a point. So what do you think I should do?" Angelle asked.

"I guess we can start safely, by publicly demanding a chance to clarify this matter with CTE," Natalie said.

Chapter 38

Two People, Three Questions

"Good evening ladies and gentlemen, and welcome to another episode of Two People, Three Questions, where we invite two polar opposites and let our audience come up with three questions for them to answer.

Tonight is a special episode. Heirs Council based political party Change The Era has been associated with recent accusations that newly elected Cultural Princess Angelle Easterner got her position after doing a deal with her traditional enemy, the newly elected Heirs Council Chairwoman Jenelle Lacey. Princess Angelle has since been demanding a chance to publicly clarify the matter with those accusing her, and we've decided to get her what she wants. So tonight we have Princess Angelle of

House Easterner, together with Change The Era leader Nadia Leah.

Let's go to the first question."

"You both say that you are interested in progress for our society, and now you are at each other's throats, even as Jashor is regaining ground in the polls. Why should we trust either of you?" an audience member stood up and asked.

"Thank you for your question. As you mentioned, Jashor is in front in the polls again, and it's thanks to people like Change The Era, who are smearing his only serious opposition. I don't know why they are doing this, but Change The Era is effectively acting as a friend of Jashor, which is why they shouldn't be trusted. As for Senator Ramstown and myself, we only want

what's best for our future, which is also what the people of Pacificland want for our future. Think about this: a Ramstown administration will see us moving in the right direction straight away, but Change The Era wants to prevent this from happening," Angelle said.

"Well, you can always trust Change The Era, as we always stand up for justice. Unlike Princess Angelle, who has sold out her values to become a Princess. And we've just proven to you that Jashor and Ramstown are not that different, so Jashor regaining in the polls is not the most important thing. The most important thing is to get behind the people really fighting for progress, and that's us, and to avoid the trap of business as usual masquerading as progress, and that's Angelle and Ramstown," Nadia said.

"Unlimited funding for university places, marriage equality within three months, and

doubling pensions, and you call that business as usual?" Angelle asked.

"There are still plenty of things that are not good enough..." Nadia said.

"Well, let's get back on track. Let's go to the second question," the host said.

"This whole fight seems to be about Princess Angelle's endorsement of Candidate Ramstown. So let's focus a bit there. Why do you think Ramstown being King is a good idea, Princess, and why do you think it's not a good idea, Miss Leah?" another audience member asked.

"As I've said many times before, a Ramstown administration will move us forward in the right direction immediately. Even if things don't

change overnight, we will be making plenty of progress. Unlimited funding for university places, marriage equality within three months, and doubling pensions, these are all just the beginning. There will also be a program to upgrade our computer and internet infrastructure, a review to identify new national parks that should be declared, and more. It really is an opportunity that's too good to miss," Angelle said.

"Change The Era has decided that we will endorse Candidate Sumon, because he stands for making society the wonderful place it should be. A Sumon administration will make university free, legislate that everyone must accept marriage equality rather than just the government allowing it, and they will also double the pensions and build new infrastructure, so in every way he either equals or exceeds Ramstown's offers. And then, unlike Ramstown, Sumon will also take in a hundred

thousand refugees per year, sue companies that don't have enough female directors, remove culturally appropriating art from our museums, set a code of acceptable speech for parliament and universities to protect our minorities from hate speech, and so on. Things that people like Ramstown are too scared to do, because they offend the status quo. But offend the status quo we must, if we are to have a wonderful and just society," Nadia said.

"But don't you notice that Candidate Sumon isn't doing too well in the polls? He cannot bring people together to create a mandate for change, instead he alienates people left, right and center. I appreciate his idealism, but his authoritarian policies are causing people to run scared. His campaign is dividing the country more than anything," Angelle said.

"That's because people with vested self interests and bigots don't want change generally. It's not his fault," Nadia said.

"Change is a process of compromise, and I agree that vested interests are a sad thing. I'm sure Candidate Ramstown feels the same way, as he tries to get the best deal for all of us. But as it stands, every vote for Candidate Sumon is a vote wasted, that could have otherwise caused change if it went to Candidate Ramstown. So isn't this helping Jashor, more than anything?" Angelle asked.

"The ends, to depose of Jashor in this case, do not justify the means. Jashor will get deposed of sooner or later, but it's not right to endorse someone like Ramstown, who won't make society wonderful enough. We cannot legitimise a lesser evil," Nadia said.

"That sounds like my way or the highway. As a responsible Princess who wants the best for her people, I cannot help but think about how many will miss out on much needed progress, because of your attitude," Angelle said.

"Well, we're running out of time. Let's go to our final question," the host said.

"My question goes back to the very reason we're here tonight. Princess, did you do a deal with Chairwoman Lacey, and if so, why do you think it's justified? On the other hand, Miss Leah, what evidence exactly do you have that there is a deal between Angelle and Jenelle, and what exactly do you know about it?"

"I do everything after careful consideration, for the best outcomes. In the case of Heirs Council, yes I did vote for Jenelle, and also directed my party members to do so. This is because, out of the two candidates, I thought she would make the less worse Chair. I did discuss with Jenelle beforehand of my decision, as I generally do in similar circumstances, so make whatever you want to out of this. But the fact is, I cannot allow someone like Nadia Leah, who thinks that people should wait for so-called real justice to come while suffering injustice without end, to use the Chair of the Heirs Council to legitimise their stance. That was the basis of my decision," Angelle said.

"What we know is that Angelle would have the numbers to win if she ran, but she chose to support Jenelle instead. That is evidence enough of a deal for me, and for many people. The real mystery is why you did not run, and you aren't addressing that," Nadia said.

"I didn't run because it wouldn't have been in the best interests of my party," Angelle said.

"Look me in the eyes, and tell me, did you do a deal or not?" Nadia asked.

"Well, I of course bargained for the best position for my party as a condition of support, as is a leader's duty. You may call it a deal if you wish. I am also not at liberty to reveal the terms of any bargain. But the fact that I continue to support what I've always supported shows that I haven't become a lap dog of anybody. In fact, I can tell you that in 2006 CTE wanted to make a deal with us, and we refused. But it wouldn't have made CTE a lap dog of ours if we agreed, right? We all make our offers to work together, and that doesn't mean anyone has to sell out their values.

"But let me put it this way. If I struck a deal with you instead, you wouldn't be complaining, right? I could have struck a deal with you instead, and I didn't. Why? Because I always do what I think would be best for our future. And that was keeping you out of the Chair. Because I couldn't run myself, Jenelle was the lesser evil," Angelle said.

Chapter 39

A Conversation

"You may think this is the way to real progress, but it's really a trap. Yes. Rather than providing a path to real progress, going for Candidate Ramstown this election will doom our momentum towards real progress, in exchange for some consolation prizes.

In fact, the point of Ramstown's candidacy is to keep real progressive ideas out of government. No, this is not a conspiracy theory. In fact, one of Ramstown's biggest supporters, Princess Angelle, has openly stated that this is her intention.

'In fact, I can tell you that in 2006 CTE wanted to make a deal with us, and we refused.'

'I could have struck a deal with you instead, and I didn't. Why? Because I always do what I think would be best for our future. And that was keeping you out of the Chair. Because I couldn't run myself, Jenelle was the lesser evil.'

Don't fall for this trap. Support real progressives this election. And if Jashor wins again, at least we've sent the likes of Ramstown a strong message, that it's real progress or bust.

Make no mistake. We don't want the crumbs from your table. We'd rather wait for what we deserve."

Angelle was so angry that she turned off the TV instantly. She was still surprised that this advertisement had been allowed to run for a

week now. Didn't the electoral laws prohibit blatant slander like this?

The pouring rain really didn't help. Angelle was already both tired and feeling bad. Tired because she had travelled all the way across town after classes, just to make this apology, and feeling bad because she felt that it was mostly her fault that Ramstown was going to lose tomorrow.

As Angelle entered the front of Ramstown's electoral office, her heart felt heavy. What was he going to say, she wondered. Was he going to be angry? If so, he did have a right to be. These thoughts kept swirling in her mind, as she waited for her appointment.

"The senator is ready to see you," the receptionist finally said, after what seemed like an eternity.

The receptionist led Angelle through the office, and into a room at the back of the office, where Ramstown was waiting.

Angelle sat down, facing Ramstown, as the receptionist closed the door and left them alone.

"Good evening, Princess, I am Senator Ramstown. I am of the impression that there is something you want to talk to me about?" he said.

"I just came here to say sorry. I am very sorry for wrecking your campaign, for destroying your

chances. Next time you run, I will keep my mouth shut, I promise," Angelle said.

Ramstown thought for a while, but did not appear upset at all.

"First of all, there isn't going to be a next time. Once a candidate loses, he should let someone else, someone fresh have a go, for the sake of the common good. It shouldn't be about any one of us personally, anyway. We are all servants of the greater good. Second of all, please don't think it's your fault. Something like this was always likely to happen. I took a chance that it wouldn't, but it was always more likely that it would," Ramstown said.

"What do you mean?" Angelle asked.

"You know, the people behind Change The Era were hellbent on getting Jashor his landslide victory, using whatever means. If you didn't

come into the story, they would just have used another reason. In fact, many of those who are personally more keen on being King than myself have decided to stay out of the game for now and wait until CTE burns out. I've only decided to run because, well, tough as the situation is, we've got to try something," he said.

"So, so you're not angry at me?" she asked.

"Of course not. In fact, I'm sure nothing you did changed the outcome. The relevant unknown was always whether the people behind CTE are well organised enough and persuasive enough, to get enough people to be willing to put off change," he said.

"I don't understand," she said.

"I see, I see. You don't really know what we're up against at all. Let me tell you then. Now, promise me you won't tell anyone that this came from me," he said.

"I promise," she said.

"You see, CTE aren't really who they say they are, and don't really want what they say they want. The people behind CTE, I know them well actually. I have known them since my Royal College days," he said.

"But that's impossible. Nadia Leah and the rest of the leadership are all around my age," she said.

"You see, Ms Leah and the rest are nothing but puppets, but even they aren't supposed to know it. CTE is, in fact, run by a bunch of old people my age. They have always had this agenda of revolution. They believe in a revolutionary change, resulting in an authoritarian government that will implement their utopian agenda. They also believe that any smaller progress is not worth it, and can only be a distraction to their grand plan. So they will raise the expectations of young people, while they keep conservative governments like Jashor's running. They believe the resulting frustration will mean that a critical mass of

people in society will one day accept their revolutionary proposal, and vote them into power accordingly," he said.

Angelle took some time to absorb it all. She couldn't believe what she was hearing.

"But CTE only exists as a party in the Heirs Council," she said.

"Yes, that's true, for the time being. They are building their base among young people, for now," he said.

"Why would they do that?" she asked.

"The authoritarian radicals believe that young people is where they will make the most inroads, for several reasons. Firstly, both here and internationally, the young people today are the most progressive cohort since the 1970s, and they are very frustrated about the past

three or four decades of relative conservatism. This makes them receptive to radical ideas. Secondly, young people generally haven't seen first hand how social change is made, step-by-step, and don't know the value of gradual progress and compromise. They are less likely to have faith in the ability of rational discussion and persuasion to change social attitudes. Therefore, they are more able to be persuaded against the effectiveness of the liberal enlightenment values of freedom, rational debate and gradual but effective progress as a result," he said.

"But you said that the authoritarian radicals are old people. They surely would know the value of freedom, rational debate and gradual progress?" Angelle asked.

"I guess it's something they've believed in since they were young and naive, and they just can't let go of it emotionally. Or maybe they haven't opened their eyes enough to see the changes in the past several decades and how they have

come about. I guess some people never evolve from the ideals of their youth, even if evidence says they were misguided," he said.

Angelle paused again, to process it all.

"There's something else I want to ask you. Since CTE is already using me to destroy other people's election campaigns, am I already being a burden on the common good?" she asked.

"Well, that's a question only you can answer yourself. I don't know Heirs Council politics that well, really. But as a general principle, strategically you should put the least controversial people on the front line, so to say, to minimise any weakness you may have," he said.

"Who told you all that?" Natalie asked.

"I can't give you any names. I swore to keep it secret. But it was an authoritative source," Angelle said.

"So what are we going to do now?" Natalie asked.

"I am going to resign from the party leadership and from Heirs Council, even though I will still be available for advice. You will lead the party and continue to bring people together the way I did. You should also use our new knowledge of the CTE in your leadership, but don't share it with too many people for now," Angelle said.

"You can't resign. We need you," Natalie said.

"As a general principle, strategically we should put the least controversial people on the front line, to minimise any weakness we may have, especially in these important times. You were

always the brains behind the party, you can do it," Angelle said.

"I'll do my best, I promise," Natalie said.

"And one more thing," Angelle said.

"What?" Natalie asked.

"You should challenge Jenelle for the Chair at the next meeting. Whether you get it or not, at least this will help put CTE's accusations behind us," Angelle said.

Chapter 40

Graduation Day

They say that graduation day, especially at Royal College, should be a proud occasion for everyone. But right now, for Angelle, this day is anything but proud. She was still feeling guilty about the recent national elections, for one. Despite what Ramstown had told her, she couldn't help but think of what might have been, if not for her 'role'. When Jashor delivered the opening speech at the graduation ceremony, she couldn't help but feel guilty. Jashor may no longer be King, if not for her, after all. Now that the ceremony is over, she really couldn't wait to leave.

"Hey Angelle," Jenelle said, coming towards her.

The sight of Jenelle made Angelle feel even worse. Should she have told Natalie to challenge for the Chair of the Council? Was that really the right thing to do? Couldn't she have just kept her promise this once? She had tried to avoid thinking of how bad Jenelle must have been feeling, having to sit and listen to Natalie deliver the Heirs Council speech at the ceremony, when she had expected all year that this would be her moment. But there was no avoiding it now.

"I'm sorry," Angelle said, not knowing what else to say.

"What are you sorry for?" Jenelle asked.

"I'm not going to hide it. I suggested to Natalie that she challenge for the Chair, to put all the rumours behind us," Angelle said.

"You really think I would feel bad for not giving that speech? Let Natalie have it, this may be her

biggest moment of all time. But for me, I will have many bigger and better opportunities. I really couldn't care less," Jenelle said.

"Really? You're not angry at me?" Angelle said.

"To say the truth, I was a bit upset when you caused me to lose the GHP leadership, as a result of losing the Chair. But then I realised that the GHP were all just self-important Jashor lackeys, and I didn't want to be a part of that anyway. I've been so much happier ever since becoming an independent. In a way, you gave me the best gift ever," Jenelle said.

"And you're not just saying this to make me feel better?" Angelle said.

"Why would I? I've never wanted to make you feel good, right?" Jenelle said.

"But today's graduation day," Angelle said.

"I don't make any such exceptions from my policy of always telling the truth," Jenelle said.

Angelle went back inside to join Natalie and her group. She felt that she had to at least say goodbye to them properly.

"Hi Natalie," Angelle said.

"Hey Angelle," Natalie said. "Haven't talked to you all day. Where have you been?"

"I've been around," Angelle said.

"You look sad. Is anything wrong?" Katie asked.

"I'm sorry to have ruined everything for everybody," Angelle said.

"Why?" Jenny asked.

"I'm sorry for my role in keeping Jashor as King, for one, and for making things so awkward for all of you, for two," Angelle said.

"Well, firstly, CTE decided to do their best to help Jashor, and that was none of your fault. I

guess we'll need to defeat the Jashor-CTE alliance in three years' time, and we'll definitely need your help again. Secondly, nothing's awkward for anyone here," Jordan said.

"No, I mean Heirs Council and the whole situation there," Angelle said.

"Heirs Council? I'll have to say that you're the best thing that's ever happened to that stuffy, old place ever. We're all in there only because of you, and now they are saying that Natalie is the most respected Chairperson in decades, because she's willing to stand for something, against the old vested interests. All of this wouldn't have happened if not for you," Katie said.

"You really need to be prouder of yourself. Look at all of us. You were the key ingredient that brought us together. As for Jashor, a Princess never gives up, right? What's three more years in the whole scheme of history?" Natalie said.

Somehow, not even this was able to cheer Angelle up.

Chapter 41

Because of Jashor

Angelle was sitting alone in a cafeteria, somewhere in the city. Besides writing her novel, which she was doing now on her computer, she doesn't have much to look forward to these days. Life without College and without Heirs Council seems very empty indeed, and her entry level job really doesn't interest her much. The dire social and political situation in this country is making her angry and sad all the time, and she has been unable to do much about it.

"Now that Ireland and the whole of the US have marriage equality too, why don't we have it too?" someone near her asked.

"Because they don't have Jashor, and when you have Jashor, you can't have nice things?" their friend replied.

Here we go again, Angelle thought. That the pro-equality side in Ireland had to work hard in the recent referendum to win their rights, or that the US Supreme Court decision only came after lots of hard work, don't seem to matter to these people. Only that they don't have Jashor. In fact, in Pacificland in 2015, it seems that everyone can just blame Jashor for everything that goes wrong, without having to do anything to help bring about change themselves. The answer for everything that's wrong seems to just be 'because of Jashor'. Otherwise, they expect change to be delivered to them on a silver platter, when Jashor finally leaves. Which is, somewhere in the indefinite future.

"Hi Angelle," Natalie said.

"Hi Natalie," Angelle said, having almost forgotten why she was in the cafeteria in the first place. Apparently Natalie had invited her to this appointment, and had something to say. What it was, she didn't know.

"The others are coming in about half an hour," Natalie said.

"There are others?" Angelle asked.

"Of course. The whole team is coming," Natalie said.

"So what is it that you want to tell me?" Angelle asked.

"I'll put it this way. We think you need a cause to fight for," Natalie said.

"What cause?" Angelle asked.

"Well, just a cause. You like to work to better society, you like to work for liberty, to bring people together, if my memory serves me right. You are also particularly passionate about marriage equality, a cause whose time has come but politics has frustrated in this country. And in the two years since our graduation, you haven't had a real fight in any of these areas. Isn't it time you put on your armour again?" Natalie asked.

"How can I fight, if nobody is willing to join me? All I even hear is 'because of Jashor', on every topic, everywhere I go. In fact, I literally just heard it again ten minutes ago, in relation to why we still don't have marriage equality," Angelle said.

"So why do you think this is happening?" Natalie said.

"Of course, it's because the likes of CTE are teaching people to think in this way. Not that I

can change that, they have heaps of funding and I don't," Angelle said.

"So what do you think would need to happen for things to change?" Natalie asked Angelle.

"The only route I see is to have Jashor removed, by having him defeated in next year's election," Angelle said.

"So would you say we support one candidate for that election, out of those available?" Natalie asked.

"The trouble is that, they are all uninspiring, and can't win. I would pick the one most likely to win, but that person just isn't there. I guess they are all waiting for CTE to burn out before they would run, maybe in five or nine years' time, to avoid suffering Ramstown's fate themselves," Angelle said.

"I guess you're right. But would you just give up there?" Natalie asked.

"I would hate to give up just like that, but what else can I do? It's what is making me sad and angry almost every day, in fact," Angelle said.

"Let me put it this way: if none of the candidates are suitable for your backing, why don't you run yourself?" Natalie asked.

"Me? Are you crazy?" Angelle asked.

"Of course not! Where's that Angelle that I used to know, the 14-year-old who ran for Heirs Council, when the odds were totally against her? Where's the Princess who would never give up, despite what people may say?" Natalie said.

"But you need funds to run for the top job," Angelle said.

"You know, we've been raising a fighting fund for you these past two years," Natalie said.

Angelle brightened up. "Really?"

"Of course. Make no mistake. You're our only hope now," Natalie said. "I have to say though, many people who care about our future have pitched in, including Senator Ramstown. In fact, I have a note from him, just for you. I don't understand it, but maybe you will."

Angelle took the folded note, and began reading.

"Remember our conversation in 2013? Nobody's going to put their hand up this time, so I agree you'll have to try. At the very least it will dampen both Jashor and CTE quite a lot."

At that moment, the others came into the cafeteria. Katie, Jordan, Mandel, Jenny, Angelle saw them approach, one by one.

And then, there was Jenelle.

"You know, you're our only hope now. You need to run for Queen in 2016, because otherwise Jashor will have a historical landslide," Mandel said.

"I beg you to take up this offer. We will support you, all the way, remember. It will be just like when we were in school," Katie said.

"You really need to run. There's no good alternative," Jenelle said.

"Wait. Don't you support Jashor? Why would you want me to ruin his landslide?" Angelle said.

"You know, people grow up. When I was younger my parents had me convinced that Jashor was right. But I don't think so now. He

really is an authoritarian pretending to be a libertarian, and I can't stand that," Jenelle said.

"But when I run, I will run strongly on marriage equality. Will you be okay with that?" Angelle said.

"Why wouldn't I? Everyone supports marriage equality now. Do I look like such a dinosaur to you?" Jenelle said.

"I don't know. In the past you were against it," Angelle said.

"In the distant past, like in the year 2000, I understand you were against it too. Does that mean anything?" Jenelle said.

"The people need their Princess to act, and act fast, you know," Natalie said.

Angelle thought for a while.

"Okay, I will run. But on one condition," Angelle said.

"What's that?" Natalie asked.

"When I run, I run to win, not just to prevent the worst. If you're in this with me, we'll all work to win," Angelle said.

Chapter 42

Angelle's Vision

This night had been almost one year in the making, but it still seems surreal to Angelle, now that it's finally happening. Until now, nobody, except for Angelle's core supporters, had known of her candidacy. It had to be kept secret until the last minute, to prevent Jashor and CTE pulling sly tricks, perhaps acting concertedly.

As the Pacificland Press Club building came into view, it was a familiar sight to Angelle. Just three years ago she had come here to endorse Ramstown's campaign. It all felt like just yesterday. Three years ago she was surprised by how 'important' she had become. Tonight she will again be the center of attention, but this time it will come as no surprise. Three years ago she was genuinely optimistic that Ramstown

had a good chance of ending Jashor's reign once and for all. Today, she is coming here to do what Ramstown ultimately could not, but to tell the truth she is also less optimistic than back then. Still, a real Princess has to hold her head high, give it her best shot, and not give up easily.

Angelle held her head high and smiled as she stepped out of the car, walking towards the building. Once again, the reporters and their cameras were already waiting outside.

"Princess, are you announcing that you are running for Queen of Pacificland?" one reporter asked.

"You will see," she replied.

"Are you really confident that you have a real chance against King Jashor?" another one asked.

"I'm not entertaining hypotheticals, but I am always confident," Angelle said.

Angelle could also hear a continuous chant of 'traitor Angelle' and 'we'd rather wait than have this witch' somewhere in the background. But she had learned to block that out.

Inside, the whole building looked familiar, just like it had been three years ago. This familiarity was a welcome sight to Angelle. At least it helped calm the nerves.

"Thank you," Angelle told Jade, the woman who had just done her makeup.

"No, we should thank you," Jade said.

"Why?" Angelle asked.

"In these complicated and hopeless times, you are the one voice who can provide some sanity to save us," Jade said.

As Angelle stepped into the press conference area, she could see many big name reporters and journalists already seated. This caused her to be a bit nervous. "Keep calm, and stay focused on the message," she told herself.

Angelle held her head high once again, and proceeded to the podium.

"Good evening ladies and gentlemen,

Today I am announcing my candidacy to run for the throne in the national elections at the end of next month.

To put it simply why I am running, it's because King Jashor has failed the country, and we are in a political depression. Basically, for many people it feels like nothing is right and there is not much hope for the future, sort of like an economic depression, even though the economy is thankfully not in as much trouble as it was a few years ago, thanks to improved conditions internationally. Normally an economic recovery would have generated hope, but this time, too many people simply know that no economic recovery can make up for the sorry state our King has left our society in.

As a relatively privileged member of society, I never used to know how so many people in this society are struggling. It was not until the

Occupy movements that many of us woke up, and found that we simply don't live up to our constitutional responsibility to deliver liberty, opportunity and the right to happiness to all citizens. Since then, many voices, including myself, have called for change, in both social and economic policy, but this has all fell on deaf ears. For the King, the only voices that matter seem to be those close to him, and his team seems to believe that any change is not needed, despite evidence to the contrary.

Many people in our society also have a passion to improve it, simply by speaking up, and letting people know that things need to be improved. I have been educated by many voices, telling me that things really do need to improve, especially regarding our approach to equal rights under the law, and anti-discrimination laws. Unfortunately, the King has also tried to marginalise these voices as much as possible, by not inviting them to government panels, by

using censorship, and even by unduly influencing what should be independent democratic bodies like the Heirs Council. Everything is stacked in favour of the views of himself and his fellow anti-change cronies, while this so-called democratic government is failing the people it should be representing.

In fact, King Jashor is failing even the very people he claims to represent, the traditionalists in society. In recent years, many traditionalists have come to the view that opening up marriage to gay couples is good for both marriage and the gay community, which, even Jashor must face it, is never going back into the closet ever. Some of his ministers have already let him know of their views to this effect, but they have fallen on deaf ears at best, and caused sackings at worst. Of course, poll after poll that show 70% of the population in support have also fallen on deaf ears. Clearly, the King has put his own views ahead of what

the people want, and what's best for society. King Jashor and his undemocratic ways on this issue is a classic example of the dangers of having an authoritarian on the throne.

Some progressives may contend that, as I am running as a progressive alternative to Jashor, I should vow to implement progressive values throughout society and force people to accept such values through government mandate. But don't worry, I will do no such thing. King Jashor has shown that it is bad for everyone ultimately to use government as a tool of authoritarian cultural enforcement. We should not replace one kind of dictatorship with another kind. We should replace authoritarianism with liberty, no qualifications added.

My vision is one where there's liberty and hope for everyone, whether you are rich or poor, progressive or traditional. That is the only fair

way. A King or Queen needs to govern for all, and the only way one can govern for all is to allow everyone their fair share of liberty and moral agency, listen to concerns from every sector of society, and make decisions that are backed up by the will of the people and the interest of society at large. Unlike King Jashor, I will govern for everyone when on the throne, and I will not force my views onto unwilling people, making them suffer.

In fact, I am going to start listening right now. Any of you who have any concerns or ideas you want me to listen to, you are welcome to send in a message to my campaign headquarters."

Chapter 43

Uncovering the Truth

"Ramstown was bad enough, but Queen Angelle? She would be the biggest setback progressives have ever had.

Don't be fooled. Angelle is nothing but a conservative trying to hold back the progressive tide, by offering the same consolation prizes Ramstown tried to offer. We said no thanks last time, and we will say no thanks again this year.

At Real Progress Or Bust, we believe that to compromise is to create injustice. Patience is a virtue, and waiting for real justice is something we are all happy to do. Don't settle for the lesser evil."

Angelle decided to switch off the TV, so she wouldn't see any more of these ads. Three weeks from polling day, and she was still substantially behind, thanks to ads like these.

Private polling obtained by Team Angelle found that they would actually be ahead if not for the CTE effort, called 'Real Progress Or Bust' this year. Basically, they have been out telling people to 'rather wait' and stay home rather than vote for Angelle, who was 'not committed to progressive values and policies', as 'evidenced by her own speech'. All very sad, but none of it a surprise. Meanwhile, Angelle was trying to stay optimistic by answering messages from the public that had come to her campaign headquarters.

Then one message gave her an inspiration:

"Dear Princess Angelle,

I just want you to know how grateful I am that you are truly sympathetic to people like me.

I am a 45-year-old gay man who has been engaged with my partner for ten years, still waiting to marry while getting old quickly. If we have to wait several more years, I really don't know if some of my loved family will live to see our wedding.

Some of the people who call themselves 'progressives' or 'social justice warriors' out there now want to go to great lengths to ensure nobody is hurt by unkind speech, or so they say. Ever since earlier this decade, they have even gone to great lengths to call out anyone who engages in this so-called 'microaggression', and have demanded that any potentially hurtful

speech be hidden behind a 'trigger warning'. Yet many of the same people (at least those who live here in Pacificland) have said loudly and clearly that it is better to wait four more years to let people like me get married, so that we can get so-called real progress, as if marriage equality wasn't. Some have even said that it is selfish for people like me to want to get married now, to short change the whole of society by settling for having you as Queen. All this speech is clearly unkind to someone like me, and I wonder why they don't merit a 'trigger warning'. Maybe trigger warnings only apply when it suits their agenda.

Anyway, good luck for your campaign. Stay strong.

Keep the faith,

John."

Angelle's hopelessness turned to anger upon reading this. A real Princess cannot just stand by and do nothing about this: injustice done in the name of so-called justice is the worst injustice ever.

This is it. Nobody can read this and not start to see the caring and idealistic veneer of CTE start cracking.

Angelle did not wait to write back.

"Dear John,

Your message was inspirational, and if more people heard it, the course of our future may be changed.

Can I use your message in a public advertisement?

Yours,

Angelle."

The rest was history, they say.

The very simple question of 'wouldn't it be better to let John get married next year' had caused deep soul searching among those formally committed to the idea of Real Progress or Bust. Less than a week after Angelle released her advertisement featuring John's message, the Real Progress Or Bust movement became

divided, and suspended operations. CTE itself was in crisis, as the membership started to question the teachings and tactics of their 'senior advisors', and many members resigned. Some even joined Angelle's campaign. Angelle's polling rose quickly, and she is now neck-and-neck with Jashor.

Recent events have recovered Angelle's faith in humanity, which had sunk to an all time low just one year ago, the very day she was sitting in that cafeteria waiting for Natalie's unexpected intervention. There are still plenty of people who really care about other people out there, apparently. Of course, there is still Jashor to fight, and being the youngest candidate for the throne in a century won't be easy. There's still a long way to go, and a big fight to be had, but this is already a good place to start.

Chapter 44

A Debate With No Moderator

"Don't worry, you'll do fine," Katie said, as the driver pulled up to the Pacificland Press Club building, a very familiar sight indeed by now. Angelle could see that the whole building had been decorated in blue and green, Pacificland's national colours, in preparation for the National Debate.

"I'm sure I can win the arguments by logic, because Jashor doesn't have much logic anyway. But in politics, everything is about perception, and Jashor is the master of deception in this area," Angelle said.

"Deception can only go so far. The truth will always win, in the end," Natalie said.

As Angelle stepped out of the car, a well-dressed young woman was already waiting to

escort her to the debate. Of course, this is the National Debate, and the whole nation is watching, so everything had to be well prepared. Even now, as Angelle is walking into the building, the cameras are already filming. Showing the two contenders arrive has been a big part of the tradition ever since people had televisions. Angelle was also well aware that this could be historical. In many previous election campaigns, certain things said in the National Debate had become defining issues, often changing the course of the whole campaign.

"The King will be asking all the questions. You just have to answer. It will be like a 'friendly chat', in his own words," the young woman told Angelle.

Angelle was sort of surprised, but not really that surprised. The reigning King always had the ability to set the agenda of the debate. Most

Kings followed convention and assigned fair rules to the debate, but Jashor, the 'ultimate deceptor' as some people call him, has been known to use very unconventional, and arguably unfair, debating formats to his advantage.

"Are you fine with this arrangement?" the young woman asked Angelle.

"Yes," Angelle said, trying to stay confident, knowing that she had no other choice.

"Good evening, ladies and gentlemen, the hard working people of the greatest nation on Earth," Jashor began.

"Today, we are here to continue the great tradition of the National Debate, a most important event that has to be held before each national election. But today, things will also be different. As you can see, I haven't invited a panel to ask questions, as per usual practice. This is because I believe many people don't connect well with the traditional format of the debate. Instead, I have decided to arrange it as an informal, friendly chat, between myself and Princess Angelle. I also believe the new format will allow a closer look at both candidates and the issues, without the distraction of the press gallery establishment, who often do not understand what everyday people are concerned about," Jashor said.

"So let's start. Princess Angelle, I must firstly congratulate you on your determination to run for election, and to serve the people of Pacificland. You must understand that the throne is a most important position and to

occupy it one needs to have both a suitable vision and an ability to carry it out. So why do you think you are more qualified, compared to all the other people out there?" Jashor asked.

"Thank you for your congratulations, your majesty. I have decided to run for election because many people told me, even begged me, they wanted me to run. I have decided to run for election also because I believe I have something to offer, something that Pacificland will miss out upon if I don't run. Something along the lines of liberty and equal opportunity, things that have been eroded in our society in the past few decades. As to if I think I'm more qualified than all other people out there, I really cannot answer this question, as nobody else except myself and your majesty are running in this election, and nobody else has articulated a vision and a plan for our future at this time. All I can say is that, I believe what I have to offer is better than what else is available," Angelle said.

"So you really think that you, a 28-year-old who graduated from Royal College not that long ago, are more qualified than me and my 62 years of experience?" Jashor asked.

"I don't know why you keep using the term qualified, but I believe Pacificland will thrive under my rule, and it wouldn't under your continued rule. Why? Because I respect people. I respect that every individual has their own moral agency, and in a fair society we should all have equal moral agency, because we are all equal before the law as citizens. Also, because I care to listen. The liberty and equal opportunity I'm offering is not just theoretical, but practical. It would be useless to offer a theoretical vision of liberty and opportunity, which in practice would lead to the systematic alienation and loss of moral agency of many people out there. I've listened to the economically and systematically

disadvantaged people out there, and I know that our system needs fixing. While you were busy demonizing Occupy Heirs Council and finding a way to shut it down, I was busy listening to people and engaging with them. While you were busy consulting with your cronies and deciding policy in a 'father knows best' way, I was listening to what people actually want, and designing ways to provide them with that opportunity while also maximising everyone else's liberty," Angelle said.

Chapter 45

My Way or The Highway

"I believe you need to learn a few things about governing, young lady. My advisers are all experts in their field, and have extensive political experience. Simply calling them cronies just shows your lack of understanding. Also, does this mean that, if elected, you are going to fire all these experts, and perhaps appoint your own friends, the most controversial party Heirs Council has ever known, to the advisory posts? If so, I do worry much for our future," Jashor said.

"I have no intention to disrespect the expertise of your advisors, and I agree they are mostly indeed experts. If elected, I will undertake a review of all posts, but I have no doubt that I will keep many of your experts on board. Perhaps I should make myself clearer. I

understand that your advisory council is made up of people who mostly agree with you on everything, or at least have decided to agree with you so they can keep their job. That isn't good representation of the wide range of opinions and voices out there. It appears that you have deliberately made it this way by weeding out people who dissent, so you can keep everything your way. The fact that you think I will just appoint my friends as advisors actually shows the way you think yourself, more than anything," Angelle said.

"Where is the evidence for all that you are accusing me of? Don't think you can just make up anything, young lady. This is not Heirs Council, you know. This is serious," Jashor said.

"Don't you call me 'young lady' anymore, like I know nothing, and don't you disparage Heirs Council, because it is still more democratic than

your government," Angelle almost wanted to say. But she didn't, because that would be taking the bait and allowing Jashor to focus on what he wanted to. Instead, she decided to just ignore the insults and stay focussed on the issues.

"We know that at least five of your advisors have been dismissed in recent years, for trying to convince you to allow marriage equality. We know that there may be more who would have wanted to do so, but now won't because they fear for their jobs. We know that quite a few of your ministers and secretaries are supporters of marriage equality, but are simply afraid to speak up because of your attitude," Angelle said.

"Well, I have always maintained that my government is to be a conservative government, governed by conservative principles and policies. Those who have

somehow changed their minds and decided that conservative governance isn't for them are of course welcome to leave the government," Jashor said.

"But at least three of the dismissed advisors are dedicated conservatives, who presented a conservative case for marriage equality to you. They did not waver from their commitment to conservatism, they merely didn't see its application the same way as yourself. So is it dedication to the King Jashor way rather than dedication to conservatism that you are looking for? Is it simply a case of 'my way or the highway'?" Angelle said.

"Well, I believe that gay marriage simply isn't compatible with real conservatism," Jashor said.

"So we're going by King Jashor's version of conservatism now. So it really is 'my way or the highway'," Angelle said.

"Well, we're going by 'real conservatism', nothing else," Jashor said.

"Not according to the majority of the Young Conservatives Association of Pacificland in an anonymous survey, not according to many prominent conservative commentators around the world, at least. So this is really just King Jashor's version of 'real conservatism'. Still quite 'my way or the highway', isn't it," Angelle said.

Chapter 46

A Passing Fad?

"Let's not focus on gay marriage anyway, most people are not interested in that and are already sick and tired of it. I believe gay marriage will be a passing fad, but real marriage will stand the test of time. Like how my way of governance, true and tested over time, will stand the test of time, but your ideology will just be another passing fad, young lady.

Already, just in the past few weeks, we saw the implosion of the far left movement in this country, where members resigned from their organisation en masse and former allies turned against each other. When you think about it, this tends to happen a lot within movements that are passing fads, and this is indeed how such fads often come to pass. We surely don't want a government losing direction and imploding like that, right? Which is why I would really worry if young lady and her team took the

reins in a month's time. The next four years would surely be rough," Jashor said.

"Well, I have had a great interest in history, and I surely haven't seen that stubbornness, refusal to adapt in light of changed circumstances, and refusing the listen to the will of the people being a great model of governance at any point in history. On the other hand, my model of governance, based around enlightenment values of liberty, equal opportunity and rational thought, has stood the test of time, proving to be the most stable, most utilitarian, and even the most able to fulfil conservative aims like a strong society and strong families. Throughout history, ideas, institutions and Kings and Queens who have listened and adapted have thrived, while those which have not have lost relevance. It is indeed for the worry of the future of marriage as a strong institution that many young conservatives have become strong

supporters of marriage equality today," Angelle said.

"But are you still so blind that you cannot see the parallels between your own movement and the far-left? Both arose as fads around the same time, both will implode at some point in the future," Jashor said.

"I'm sorry, your majesty, but I'm instead seeing the parallels between your governance and the far-left. Different in content, but similar in methods. A top-down governance where conformity is expected and liberty means nothing. A vision that does not include much freedom. Both of you are too obsessed with imposing your will on the rest of society, rather than let the free market of ideas work out the best solutions in the natural way. But people can only live with taking orders against their own conscience for so long. Sooner or later, it

will not hold. Neither the far-left or your government really respect people's equal moral agency or really listen to what the people out there really want, so neither of you will have people's respect and support for too long, I imagine. The implosion of your party is already under way, with many younger members having resigned because of marriage equality and other issues," Angelle said.

"Well, I think young lady here really doesn't know much about the real world of governance. But we're running out of time today. So I think we should end it here," Jashor said.

"Thanks for your time, your majesty," Angelle said.

Chapter 47

A New Nation

The results came in quickly. In the end, it was a landslide. Jashor's patronising attitude and inability to effectively counter Angelle's questions in the debate shook to the core many people's confidence in him. The lackluster economy and the lack of opportunities for many young people caused growing resentment against the governance and its ideology. The festering sore of the division over marriage equality also made the whole conservative movement directionless and passionless. The end of Jashor's reign had a feeling of inevitability about it, when it finally came.

"It's time to give your victory speech," Natalie said.

Angelle stepped up to the platform.

"Dear ladies and gentlemen, the great people of Pacificland,

I am honoured to be elected to serve Pacificland as its Queen for the next four years. I have to thank all my supporters, all the volunteers, and especially the support of my great family. Thank you mom, thank you dad, and thank you Sam, my great fiancé.

Being Queen of such a great nation is a daunting task, and many people have doubted my experience. Fortunately, for me it's not about my way or the highway. The next four years is not about me shoving my beliefs down society. The next four years will be about you, your opportunities, your aspirations, and your moral agency. Some people say that when you change

the person on the throne you change society. You may wonder what change is in store. The answer is simple: Pacificland will get to know liberty and opportunity like never before. It will get to know and get used to the fact that the way society functions does not need to depend on the whims of the King or Queen at all. Pacificlanders will rediscover their moral agency, and come to learn how to use this birthright well.

But this is all I will say for now. As I said, it's not all about me. So here are the perspectives on what I will do or at least should do, from other people," Angelle said.

Natalie took to the stage next, bringing along a whole group of people, including Katie, Jenelle and others.

"I'm Natalie. You may know me as the Chairperson of the Heirs Council, but I am also a close friend of Angelle. It may surprise some of you that Angelle hasn't always been a supporter of marriage equality. I was the first person to convince her about it. But the thing was, she was a listener, and wouldn't let the prejudices of her own upbringing get in the way. And I'm talking about back in 2003 too, back when it was an unconventional idea. Angelle doesn't shy away from the unconventional, and doesn't feel a need to conform to everyone's ideas. I'm sure that under her reign, Pacificlanders will also learn to love the idea of being unique, of developing and acting on one's own conscience, and of respecting other people's different ideas."

"I'm Jenny, supporter and friend of Angelle, who once quit her camp and came back a decade later. I first joined her camp because I was friends with Natalie, and later quit because

I was pressured by my family and church, who said I shouldn't support or even be friends with a so-called gay marriage activist. But the truth was that, gay marriage activist she was not. She was only concerned about freedom and equal opportunity for everyone, and something she calls equal moral agency. Later on, she was crucial to bringing conservatives around to support marriage equality on family values grounds and support other aspects of liberty and equality too. Her inclusive approach not only made me eventually comfortable to rejoin her camp, but I was also able to convince my family and some church friends to become supporters. Angelle is Queen who will rule for all, and do so equally. The culture wars will come to an end under her reign."

"I'm Ashley, Natalie's sister. I'm also in a same-sex marriage. We got married in 2006 overseas and it's high time this marriage is recognised here. It's just one of the things Angelle will fix.

Not so long ago I was almost an outcast among my gay friends for supporting Angelle. People thought I was doing it for Natalie's sake. Why should we, as a community, support Angelle, when she wouldn't support every one of our demands, some would say. It's true that Angelle has never supported us getting special rights like our own dedicated LGBT representative in parliament, or the ability of gay clubs to exclude straight people, but that's because she treats everyone the same way. Where we are being treated inferiorly, as in marriage laws, Angelle is passionate to fix. In fact, when those on the left that my gay friends used to support eventually turned on us, asking us to wait indefinitely for marriage equality or be called selfish, it was Angelle who came to the rescue. Angelle recognises that there is nothing selfish about demanding for your rights and to have them as soon as possible, and nobody has a responsibility to sacrifice their rights for a vague so-called greater good. I'm sure that any minorities out there who are still being

mistreated, she will come to your assistance in the same way."

"I'm Katie, supporter and friend of Angelle. My admiration for her began during the 2004 Heirs Council campaign, where she was the underdog who wouldn't bend her values to suit the then fashion of the times. Throughout the years, Angelle has stayed true to her values, even as the political winds blew one way, and then the other. You always know what Angelle stands for."

"I'm Chee, founder of the former movement called Occupy Heirs Council. We set out as a movement for liberty and equal opportunity for the 99% of society, and was surprised that an apparently privileged MHC would have time for us. Later on, we were hijacked by the far-left and then quashed by Jashor, in a parallel with many similar movements overseas. But our goal

had at least been partially met. Our concerns were heard by a future Queen, and her policies have taken our concerns into account."

"I'm Senator Ramstown, failed candidate for the throne in 2013. Angelle shares a lot of my values, although I have to say that she is probably more philosophical and I'm more pragmatic. She supported my campaign in 2013, and the far-left used an irrelevant Heirs Council controversy to discredit me through discrediting her. She actually felt guilty about it, and withdrew from politics altogether. For many months, I wrote to her to convince her that it was not her fault, and that it would be a waste if she just withdrew from public life. I was prepared to be disappointed. But when we explained to her that there was no other hope last year, she rose to the challenge, rising high into the sky from the ashes. Angelle doesn't disappoint her supporters, I later learnt."

"I'm Jenelle, newly elected Cultural Princess in the Class of 2016, and a, you can say, frenemy, of Angelle. For most of my time at Royal College I saw Angelle as an enemy, simply because my family taught me that her kind were troublemakers. I also used to believe that good governments are the ones that uphold traditional practices and institutions, and put troublemakers in their place. But this was not good government, or even good conservatism. It was just elitist dictatorship. While culturally I remain a dedicated conservative, I have since realised that liberty-based governance is the best bet in the long run for anyone with a conscience, conservative or otherwise. I also have to say that Angelle has been both a worthy adversary and a great friend. A worthy adversary, because she would really put effort into thinking about arguments you put to her rather than just mouth the usual clichés, and a great friend, because even if you were once

enemies with her, she will still care about your feelings, apparently. So King Jashor, you can be sure that Angelle won't mistreat you the way you mistreated her."

THE END

Also from TaraElla...

3 Movements (Feminism, LGBT Rights, Marriage Equality), 2 Diaries, 1 Trans Woman's Message

Natalie is a young trans woman living in the early 21st century. Her diaries chart both her own transition story, and the cultural and political events of the 2000s and 2010s in the US, UK and Australia. In the beginning, she had felt rejected by feminism all her life, and also decided to reject feminism. Feminism's complicated relationship with marriage equality, something she was passionate about, became yet another reason for her to reject feminism. However, as feminism changed, so did her perspective. Did Natalie ultimately decide to become a feminist? And if so, on what terms?

From the author: "I could have written a manifesto of inclusive feminism, but I know that some of you would still be unconvinced. So instead here is a story, inspired by real life stories I have known. I am sure many of you will be convinced of the need for a more inclusive feminism after reading this.

While Natalie's story is fictional, the perspective taken on both being trans and the social and political movements of the 2000s and 2010s are inspired by real life accounts, and represent the very real perceptions of real people living today. Stories like Natalie's are out there everywhere, and if feminism is to be truly inclusive and effective, the messages contained in this book should be seriously considered."

Also from TaraElla...

The Story of a 21st Century 'Somebody': Independent Culture Creation in the 2000s & 2010s

For most of humanity, most people were destined to live and die anonymously. To be 'somebody' in this world, a somebody whose opinions would be heard in any way beyond close friends, was a privilege very few had enjoyed. In this environment, there would eventually be no point for most people to continue to think of themselves as a 'unique individual'. It surely looks amazing in hindsight, how far we have come in less than two decades.

This book is primarily about my journey to become a 'somebody' with something to say. Topics covered include how technology has enabled people like myself to have a voice, what it feels like to join the cultural

conversation and take cultural stances, and participating in politics and the 'culture wars' through citizen journalism. I will also examine the bigger cultural impacts of this democratization of culture creation.

Throughout this book, I will be telling my own story so far, as a cultural voice in this rapidly changing world. But I will also be illustrating the wider story of how profoundly the world changed, in these first two decades of the 21st century. The technology changed first, and that was groundbreaking enough, but I think that the greatest change was in the culture.